対魔導学園35試験小隊

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"

5. 百鬼の王

柳実冬貴

ファンタジア文庫

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon" 対魔導学園35試験小隊

Volume – 5 - The King of Hundred Demons - Over Dark

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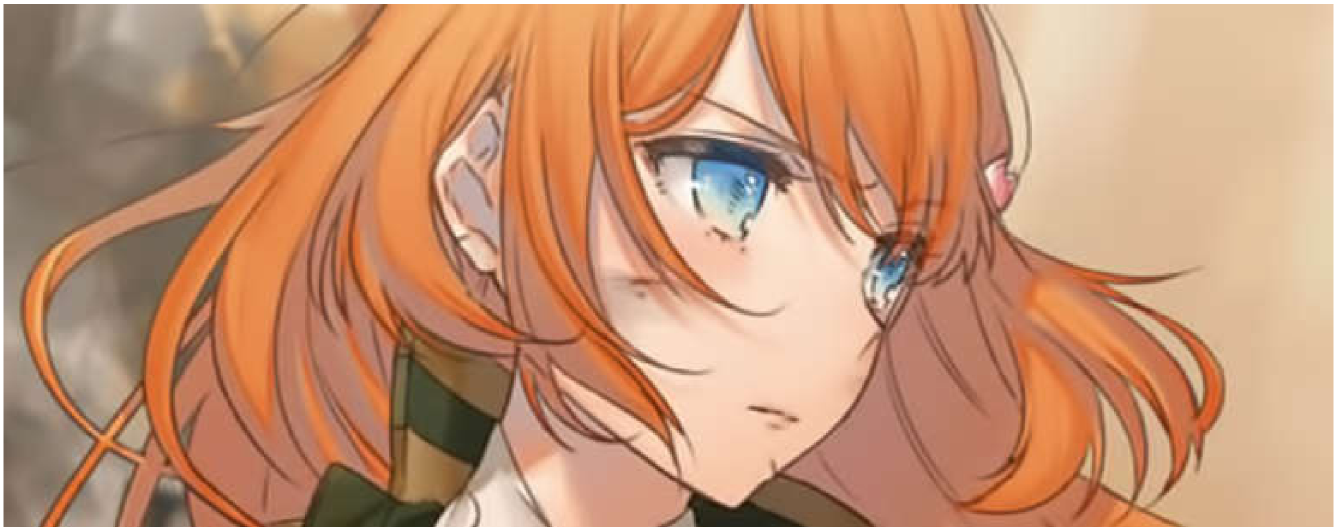

LN Published by Fujimi Fantasia Bunko

Translated by Krytyk

PDF by swhp

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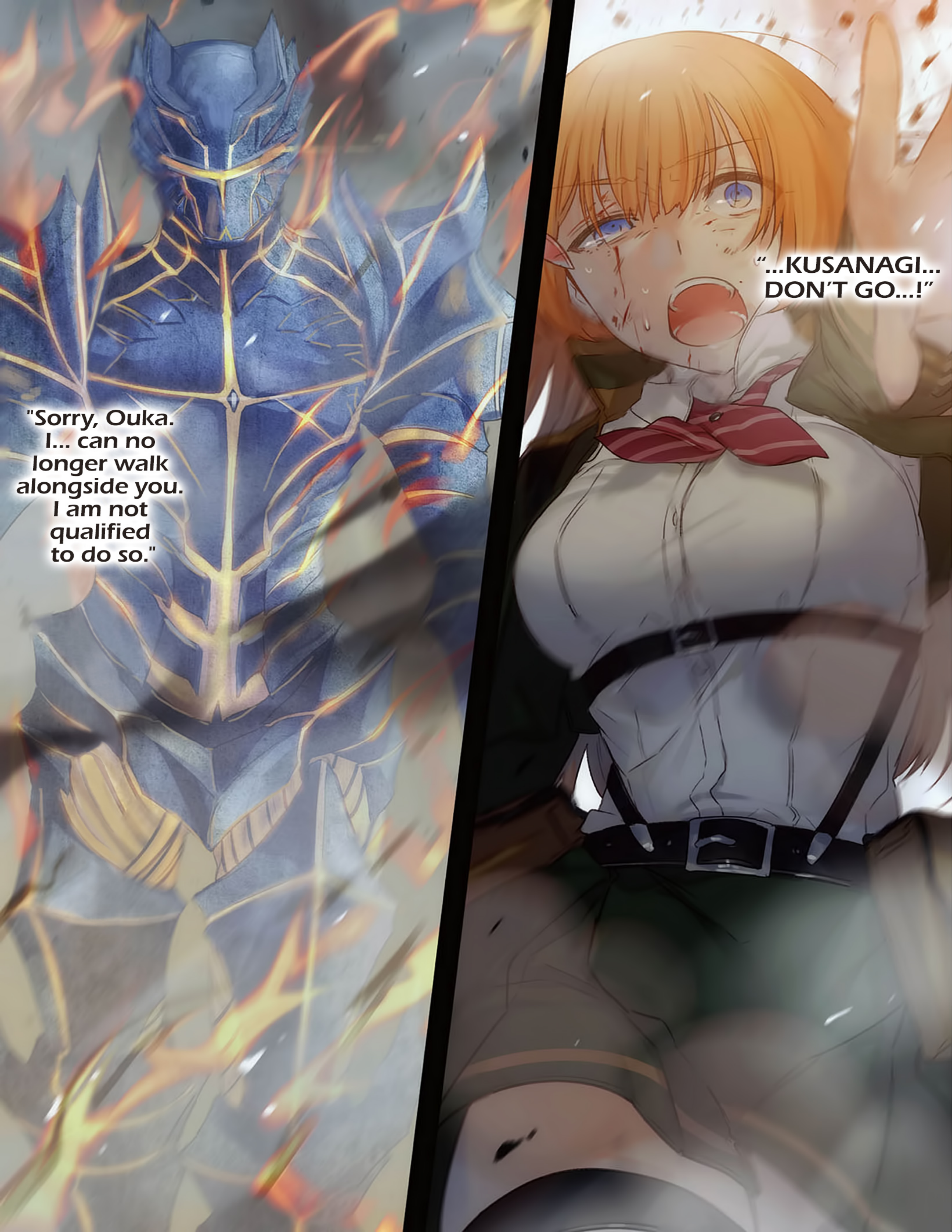
"Will Kusanagi Takeru kill his little sister, or not... let's bet on that."


"...KUSANAGI... DON'T GO...!"
"Sorry, Ouka. I... can no longer walk alongside you. I am not qualified to do so."

Prologue

Every time Takeru comes to this place, he feels incredibly sad.

It's not that he didn't want to come here. He didn't mind the price he had to pay to meet her.

It's just that every time he comes to this place, he is reminded of something he would rather forget.

Of his own powerlessness.

"Kusanagi Takeru-san, right? I was waiting, do you have a visitation certificate?"

Asked by a woman, Takeru took out a card from his breast pocket.

The woman put the card in the reader and pushed two, three buttons on the keyboard.

"Confirmed. Next, list the items you——"

She passed a paper to him. Takeru took the pen in hand and wrote with a practiced hand.

It was a procedure he went through many times already.

What awaited him after this, was a thorough belongings inspection. Body washing. Triple body scan. Washing once again. And after passing through the body analysis filter twenty times, Takeru finally could see his little sister.

"…………"

After riding on the escalator, he descended lower and lower down to the bottom. He slipped through fifty layers of partitions one after another. After he passed through them, the bulkheads behind him closed, and the ones in front have opened.

It was the same as always, but he always felt like a food item carried by a belt conveyor. It felt mechanical, inorganic, the process was way too strict.

But, unless he does this, Takeru won't be able to meet with his little sister. The last thick partition wall has opened.

On the other side, five Dragoons and one Dullahan were waiting for Takeru.

"Just on time, aren't you. Now then, we'll perform the last examination now."

Takeru raised his arms, and underwent the last body check.

The Dragoons all around firmly aimed their guns at Takeru.

After the body check was completed, the Dullahan bowed.

"Do your best not to tell the inmate about the school's structure nor the security of the Inquisition. In case any classified information is disclosed, it will be edited out from our side, however there will also be a penalty imposed on you on your future meetings, be warned."

"Yes."

"Please refrain from using gestures. As soon as we notice any signs of encrypted information relayed by gestures, you will be shot. Is that fine?"

"Yes."

"The visitation time you can use is 15 minutes, the timer will start immediately after you enter. The buzzer will sound in five minute intervals, the count will begin 30 seconds before the time ends. Be sure to exit before the zero count."

As Takeru listened to the simple explanation, something in the Dullahan's words confused him.

"Um, this time it should be 10 minutes..."

"The Chairman said he doesn't mind if we extend it by 5 minutes."

"...eh."

"『"Recently there was no opportunity for you to meet, think of it as a present to atone for that from me."』 is what he said."

As the Dullahan conveyed the message from Chairman to him, Takeru responded expressionlessly.

"...it's been a while, but please make it 10 minutes."

"Is that fine?"

"Yes."

Takeru dismissed it flatly and went towards the door to the visiting room.

It was an incredibly secure door with multiple doors on it.

He passed through a few disinfection filters, and a space appeared in front of him.

With only one light bulb hanging, a box-shaped jet black room.

There was a clear glass window in the middle of the room.

On the other side——there was a figure of a girl using her fingers to mess with a band-like device on her head, she was sitting on a folding chair.

When the girl saw Takeru, a smile appeared on her face and she moved her mouth as if looking for words.

"...it's been a while, Onii-chan."

The girl's voice flowed from the speakers attached to the ceiling of the room.

When Takeru heard the nostalgic voice, he smiled lightly.

"Yeah, I'm sorry for coming late again... Kiseki."

He called the girl's name.

Kusanagi Kiseki. Kusanagi Takeru's little sister.

His one and only blood-related family. Her age was the same as Takeru, they were twins.

Since they were dizygotic twins, they didn't resemble each other that much.

Slightly curly black hair, black pupils. She had small stature, thin arms and legs.

Unlike the robust Takeru, Kiseki gave off a delicate impression.

As if she were to break the moment she's touched, that's what others felt.

"No, don't worry about it. For Kiseki, time does not matter at all."

"I see. Then I'll be honest. Nii-chan was lonely not being able to to meet Kiseki."

As Takeru said that lightly, Kiseki reddened a little and laughed after placing a hand on her mouth. Takeru sat down on the folding chair in that stood front of Kiseki's and faced her.

"...did you grow a little?"

After hearing Takeru, Kiseki looked up at him and placed a hand on her head.

"I wonder? I can't tell myself... children grow in their sleep is what they say, right? I might have. Onii-chan too, has grown taller."

Takeru made a gesture similar to Kiseki.

"I've been training ever since I was small, I might have grown proportionally."

"...y-you turned so cool, hehehe."

She scratched her cheek in embarrassment and looked down as she spoke.

That gesture of scratching her cheek, is very similar to what I do. Takeru thought.

"How's school? Did something interesting happen again?"

"Oh right, in fact, I found a new friend. She's a problem child as well, but she won't lose to any of the platoon members——"

The moment he said 'platoon', Kiseki let out an "aa".

It must have been considered a part of classified information, his voice must have been erased. The glass window that separated them acted as a filter and even though he was visible through it, in fact it was a highly advanced display, Kiseki herself was even further down in the facility. If one said any classified information, sometimes a mosaic appeared as not to show the lip movement.

It was a meeting just in name, in fact it was just a conversation through video call. Nevertheless, it was a precious time for both Takeru and Kiseki.

Both of them were in separate boxes, and spend their time in a silly way.

They couldn't get close up and talk secretly, their speech was regulated, and they couldn't touch.

The two, could temporarily meet their family, and they clung to it.

"I see... a person with beautiful hair, and a person with a muffler. Onii-chan you accustomed yourself to having friends haven't you."

"Yeah, I think so. The two of them are at odds, but in fact, they both acknowledge each other. They're always at each other's throats, I've lots of fun seeing them like that."

"...by the way Onii-chan. That person with beautiful hair, is it a woman?"

When she said 'woman', Takeru was startled.

"Y-yeah, that's right."

"So that's it after all. That's right, because she's a woman you said she has beautiful hair."

"...w-what is it. Whether it's a man or woman has nothing to do with friendship right?"

When he tried to cover it up, Kiseki laughed lightly.

"Onii-chan's a poor liar."

"I-I'm not lying."

"Cause, when Onii-chan speaks of that person, he turns really lively."

"...there's no way that's true, is it."

"I seee. Onii-chan found someone he likes."

Kiseki is happy for you, she murmured while squinting.

"All Onii-chan did until now was worry about Kiseki... that made me worry too."

"..........."

"But, I'm really glad."

The expression Kiseki displayed, showed loneliness.

"I'm sorry, Onii-chan. For saying ''that'' two years ago... I think Onii-chan's feelings are real. From the very beginning, Onii-chan was someone who could tell how people feel."

"...Kiseki."

She stared at him with a motherly expression, which in turn made him put up a difficult expression.

"It's not that. The feelings I have for her is nothing like love. For me, she is... she is a benefactor of mine."

"...benefactor?"

"Yeah. That's why, it might be close to affection. I don't really get it, but her cool appearance as she stands upright... feels incredibly dazzling to me."

With his eyes looking in the distance, he spoke about the girl with beautiful hair... Ouka.

These were the words from the bottom of his heart. For Takeru, Ouka was his benefactor.

Ouka herself probably hasn't realized it, it was just a result of what happened. Takeru started to think of her as of a benefactor when he finally settled down as he was now.

He wanted to tell Ouka about these feelings of his one day, but it was embarrassing so remained silent up until now.

"...I see. But, no matter what kind of feelings Onii-chan has for that person, Kiseki is happy about it. I think, it's a wonderful thing."

"..........."

"Just seeing Onii-chan become cooler and cooler, is Kiseki's happiness."

Her endlessly gentle voice gripped Takeru's heart.

Onii-chan's happiness, is Kiseki's happiness too.

Every time she said so, Takeru felt unbearable pain.

"...happy... as if..."

Unable to stand it, he let out a hoarse voice.

At the same time, the buzzing sound came from the speakers and the thirty-second countdown started.

"...trapped in a place like this... made to sleep this entire time..."

"? Onii-chan, I can't hear you. What did you say? Onii-chan?"

"Looking all-happy hearing my story... saying that you're happy with that, as if..."

His words probably didn't reach Kiseki.

The people in the control room must have cut off his words. Without regard to it, Takeru continued.

"I can no longer see your face. What are you talking about? Can it be that you're crying? Hey, let me hear your voice? It's scary... Onii-chan."

Kiseki's anxious voice was silenced.

"The one who saved me wasn't Just Ootori... it was you too, Kiseki. Because you saw through me at that time... because at that time you reached out to me... I became the person I am right now!"

Takeru stood up from his chair and put a hand on the glass window-like display.

As he did that, the bewildered Kiseki overlaid her palm with his.

"Even though I know it was impossible... but it doesn't mean it's something that can be forgiven...!"

"............"

"Even though I know that I can't change anything in a world like this!"

"............"

"Even so, I want for you to... live a normal life...!"

Takeru's body collapsed and he knelt.

Kiseki looked at him with wonder.

"This is too much... I can't even relay something like this to you..."

After collapsing, he started to shed tears.

She bent her knees and once again overlaid her palm with his.

"Kiseki is happy with just being able to meet Onii-chan once in a while... okay?"

"............"

"That's the only thing I want. That's why, don't cry, Onii-chan."

Soothing him, comforting him, Kiseki whispered that to Takeru.

Takeru didn't know what she said, what kind of expression she had... even so, Kiseki embraced his heart.

In the current situation that wouldn't change, he suffered, and suffered, in the middle of his suffering a single door opened.

"——It's time. Please exit the room."

He heard the cruel words of the Dullahan who stood in front of the door.

Takeru stood up heavily, turned to his dearest little sister and took a deep breath.

Using that as an opportunity, he put on a mask.

"...I'll come again, Kiseki."

Turning around only once, forcing herself, Kiseki smiled.

Kiseki too, finally saw her brother's face and put on a relieved smile.

"Yup. I'll be waiting, always. Come meet me again. Onii-chan."

That was the exchange of their usual farewells.

Incredibly sad, incredibly ruthless, the siblings' farewell.

Kusanagi Kiseki was officially designated as an SS-class danger, she had a dedicated isolation facility dedicated to her in the deepest prison in the forbidden area.

Five years ago, a tragedy happened in a certain poor village.

The culprit who has massacred 300 villagers overnight, was Kusanagi Kiseki.

The incident hasn't been publicized and has been covered up as a natural disaster caused by great flood of a nearby river.

Kusanagi Kiseki was very special, as an extremely heretical existence, there weren't many who knew of her.

Her life mostly consisted of sleeping within a huge Iron Maiden. Except for the time during which Takeru could see her and the treatment that was performed on her on regular basis, she was never woken up.

The reason she was monitored this strictly, wasn't because she was a witch.

Strictly speaking, Kusanagi Kiseki's was a different type of heretical existence from witches

"............Onii...chan."

After her brother has left, Kiseki spat out a voice full of pain in the dark room.

"I'm sorry... I lied."

She grasped the hem of her clothes and smiled mocking herself.

At the same time, from the headband-type device on her head a sound of something charging rang out.

"Help me...I can't...stand it any longer...it hurts...it's painful...I can't bear it."

Feeling a faint headache, Kiseki pressed her hand against her forehead.

Tears spilled from her eyes.

"I want to meet Onii-chan... I want to touch Onii-chan."

The tears that stopped have started flowing once again moistening her cheek.

"Onii-chan..."

Her visibility turned hazy, and she fell down from the chair.

"Why didn't you... kill, save Kiseki...?"

Through the nausea and pain, Kiseki mouthed.

While screaming inside of her mind, she closed the eyes that were turning heavier and heavier.

《"Visitation is over. Let's start the treatment... now then, let's investigate her resistance to poison today. We'll closely measure the time it takes until her heart stops beating."》

As her consciousness was fading, she heard words that incited fear inside her come from the speakers.

She couldn't raise a scream, it was impossible for her to call for help.

The only thing she could to do to escape from the pain that made her feel like dying, was to dream about her brother's smile.

And so——Kusanagi Kiseki's hell continued.

Chapter 1 - Prelude to Collapse

The Witch-Hunting Festival has ended peacefully. Currently, it's the winter season.

As for the normal schools, it was the time where they approached the end of the second semester.

Because the students were cold in just their uniforms, the number of people who had additional protection against the cold has increased. Colorful leaves were covering the ground and frustrated cleaners were tidying it.

The students' movements also changed together with the season, they started to show a variety of different responses.

Those who belonged to superior platoons; there were many students who have already fulfilled the quota and had lively, carefree expressions.

On the contrary, the students who didn't have good enough results couldn't allow themselves to feel carefree.

There were three months left until the deadline, four months including the vacations.

The winter in AntiMagic Academy was a turning point for all the students.

On such a winter day, in the residential area at dinner time.

At this point of time, students and office workers were still on their way home.

A girl was running with a fierce momentum through the moderate pedestrian traffic on the road.

"YOU WON'T GET AWAAAAYyyyyyyyyyy!!"

As the girl, Saionji Usagi, was sprinting through the road, her hair seemed to raise up due to her anger.

Ahead of her, ran a man who looked like a delinquent , one could see him boarding a remodeled sedan car. Its engine was already warmed-up and it suddenly accelerated.

"——That is a point get!"

Usagi knelt on one knee and shot the car's tire with her semi-automatic sniper rifle.

Without missing, the single bullet punctured through the rear tire and the sedan's huge body shook. After swaying to the sides unsteadily, it bumped into the guardrail.

Three men came out from within the car and started shooting at Usagi with sub-machine guns.

The civilians in the vicinity started escaping while screaming.

Despite being shot at by three men carrying sub-machine guns, Usagi calmly responded taking one down with a single shot.

The remaining two took a motorbike parked nearby and immediately escaped, after they passed the crossroad, Usagi saw that and let out a "Wha...".

"O-Otoriii〜〜〜〜!"

《"I know!"》

As the men slipped away from her, Ouka's voice reached her from the intercom.

Immediately after that, from the right alley of the crossroads the heavy sound of an engine resounded, then, another motorbike has suddenly accelerated. Its driver was Ootori Ouka, it was one of the Inquisition's machines nicknamed 'blue bikes', Ouka followed the two who were running away.

The two who were turning into an alley looked back and screamed.

Approaching them from behind with incredible momentum was a woman with sunset-coloured hair.

With a loud sound of a siren ringing out, Ouka further approached them.

《"Stop those motorbikes. You're charged with four crimes. First, illegal trade of D-Rank Magical Heritage. Second, obstructing the Inquisition's enforcers on duty. Third, illegal firearms possession. Fourth, riding a motorbike without helmets on."》

Through a loudspeaker the motorbike was equipped with she told them what they were guilty of.

"You're the one without a fucking helmet!"

The man who was riding in the rear turned around to show her his middle finger and shouted.

Surprised, Ouka touched her head with one hand.

《"...it's an emergency so it can't be helped."》

"Stop making it friggin convenient for yourself!"

《"I'm reflecting on it. I'll pay the fine. I don't care as long as it doesn't decrease the amount of points."》

"If you want us to forgive it, then stop chasing us!"

《"This and that are two different things."》

Ouka's motorbike further accelerated.

The driver who looked back over the shoulder took out a piece of paper that had a magical circle engraved on it from his waist pocket.

"...no helpin' it. Gotta use the charm."

"That's something we're supposed to sell...! We don't have too many of them!"

"It's all for nothing if we get caught right? We need to lose them here."

The driver said so, and attached the charm to the motorbike's body.

Magic power leaked from the charm with a rumble and began to erode the motorbike.

The engine's sounds turned clearly abnormal, the front wheel was raised up and the motorbike the two criminals were riding rapidly accelerated.

"Unlike nitro, on top of acceleration this doesn't put any burden on the engine!"

"Ahhh... what a waste... we could have sold this expensive charm to a racing's sponsor..."

"Adieu, test platoon! You fail at following through!"

He laughed mockingly as his motorbike accelerated.

The 《Highway Fairy》 charm's spell was originally used on horses, after being improved by modern witches, it was possible to use them on machines now. The spell didn't put any burden on the machine and magic power has compensated for the fuel, it was very easy to use. Moreover, the maneuverability is improved by threefold, without having to make curve turns which required skill from the driver one could turn around freely.

There was no way a normal motorbike could catch up with it.

Their acceleration has paid off, and the distance between them and Ouka has gradually increased——or it was supposed to.

"W-wha?!"

Even though they had used a Highway Fairy charm, the blue bike was keeping up with their speed.

《"Who's the one who can't follow through here."》

After saying that along with a sigh, Ouka's motorbike explosively accelerated with its front wheel.

In an instant, her motorbike lined up with the culprits'.

"Our blue bike underwent devilish remodeling of our mad scientist. The insides are completely different from the regular bike's."

As Ouka indifferently said the truth to the two, Ikaruga's voice sounded in her ears saying "Could you correct what you just said?", but she ignored it.

"Gimme a break... we're using instant charms here?!"

"The basic specs are just different. That motorbike of yours which uses a charm can be at most comparable to a racing motorbike."

"Then what's up with that motorbike of yours!"

"No idea... don't ask me."

Really not knowing, she looked away.

But even though she was looking away, she still aimed her muzzle at the driver.

"By the way, if I shoot you in this situation, you will surely die. Of course, my bullets are anesthesia ones, but it won't matter when you fall."

"!!"

"Will you surrender, or be shot which will result in you hitting the guardrail and turning into a slab of meat."

With her inborn ruthless gaze, Ouka gave the two grace time to decide.

The man in the rear seat grabbed the driver's shoulder feeling uneasy.

"...w-what do we do."

"Haa, you've no sense of danger at all. If we're shot, we die. There's no merits in being held responsible either, that's why, we have to outrun her *like this!*"

While saying so, the driver took out a new charm from his pocket.

"I still have twenty charms here! The boost is supplemented by magic! No matter how good your damn motorbike's performance is, it's gasoline! With that much horsepower let's see how long will your fuel last!"

"…………"

"If you want to shoot, then shoot! Unlike you, it was decided that there's no future for us right from the moment we were born! We're always prepared to die!"

As the driver displayed a sympathetic attitude, Ouka stared back at him coldly.

Were it the Ouka from before, she would shoot them on the spot without hesitation.

However, she was different now.

Letting out a small sigh, she dropped the speed of her motorbike.

Taking the chance, the two escaped.

Ouka called out to the intercom with a cool expression.

"I have led them on the scheduled course. We're switching to plan B... Kusanagi, I'll leave it to you."

《"...you serious. I can't guarantee it'll succeed though?"》

"If I shot them at this speed, I would end up killing both. If you want that, I'll do so."

《"R-roger, roger that! I'll do it!"》

As Ouka heard Takeru's voice, at her own pace, she followed the two that were escaping.

"Hehehe, seems like she gave up."

"She has no guts. If folks like that can join Inquisition, then we'll make it real high in the future."

They kept accelerating using the Highway Fairy charm.

Like a water strider running through the water, the motorbike bent at an acute angle.

No one could keep up with them. Once they get out to the highway in this state, they'll definitely get away.

The two were sure of that.

"Hey! In front!"

The man in the rear seat yelled.

Far ahead of them right in front of the highway's entrance, a lone boy was standing there.

"...is he insane?"

"That test platoon's comrade huh. Fine, let's have a chicken race, motorbike against a human."

"Won't you avoid him?"

"He's going to come at us anyway!"

The motorbike accelerated. Fortunately, the road was straight, it was perfect for a chicken race.

The boy increased the motorbike's speed and could clearly see Takeru's figure at the moment.

Takeru opened his legs wide and stretched both of his hands out to the left side.

Despite being in front of Takeru who was making a strange stance, the driver dropped his vigilance and headed straight for him.

Although he felt that it's eerie that Takeru didn't move away, he continued to step on the accelerator.

It was the very instant they were about to clash, at that time.

Takeru activated Soumatou to match the motorbike's charge.

He released his twisted upper body and swung his arm to match the rotation of his hips, he grabbed the collars of the two people riding astride on top of the motorbike.

Of course, the motorbike left the two held by Takeru behind and continued to move forward.

"——Ha!"

Without killing the momentum after grabbing the necks of the two, he rotated his body.

Naturally, Takeru's body swayed because of the motorbike's passengers' momentum as they were traveling at high speed, and he continued to turn round and round.

Spinning like a top, he continued to rotate.

The rotational speed was gradually lost.

"Aaand there...we go."

Although Takeru staggered just a little, he was able to stop the rotation somehow and put down the two he grabbed with his hand.

The caught two were trembling and their faces were pale, they knelt on the ground not letting even a voice leak out.

Takeru let out a breath and spoke into the intercom.

"Securing complete. I managed somehow."

《"...I saw it from here. W-what was that, just now."》

"Oh, if had I just caught them their necks wouldn't handle it right? That's why I've been going around in circles to slowly reduce the speed."

《"As usual, you're full of unexpected and exaggerated ideas."》

"I don't want to be told that by someone who drops out of air vents and stops a Dragoon with just a pistol."

After he responded to her frankly, Ouka came over on the motorbike at a steady speed down the road ahead.

She stopped the motorbike in front of Takeru and got off, she handcuffed the two men and secured the charms.

"Hmm... the points will decrease because of the number of the same-type Magical Heritages, but the number itself is high. There's roughly fifty of them. This time it's a big win."

"It's thanks to the Student Council President. Despite having this many ranked Magical Heritages the enemy organization was small, and we knew what kind of charms they had beforehand."

"There were a lot of preparations. Were it our the usual selves, we would just suppressed them forcefully and wouldn't think of what to do if they ran away. Certainly, without information it won't go this smoothly."

We need to thank the President, Ouka said.

Takeru touched the intercom once again, this time communicating with Usagi and Ikaruga.

"It succeeded. Cheers for the good work you two."

《"Fuffuun♪, it's thanks to the great trap I laid isn't it〜."》

《"Is that something to say after letting them escape?"》

《"Wha!!"》

After hearing Ikaruga's words, Usagi cried out.

《"Even though you were confident about taking out seven people which was in fact your duty, you missed and had to chase after five of them didn't you?"》

《"T-that was within the predicted range of error! Also, I've p-properly stopped the car right?! In the end only two of them escaped!"》

《"So, you let them escape right?"》

《"GRrryaa!"》

Takeru smiled wryly as the two played around.

"You did really well, Usagi. You too, Suginami, you did well improvising."

《"Messing around with motorbikes is my hobby too."》

《"...is messing around with weapons a hobby for you as well?"》

《"Don't be stupid. Weapons are my reason for living, not a hobby."》

《"W-why are you the only one who has not changed at all!"》

《"I'm just being my usual self. In contrast to that, you sure have changed haven't you, Usagi."》

《"Ah? Is... that so? W-well, even I, in the olden days..."》

《"Your boobs have grown even bigger."》

《"I'm not happy about it at all!!"》

As usual, they continued to bicker loudly.

The noisy parts like this didn't change, but Takeru felt that everyone had grown. Since the incident during the Witch-Hunting Festival, Usagi was no longer overcome with tension during battles. The problems with Tenmyouji Reima and the Saionji house have settled down to a certain degree, and finally she started to notice what she was capable of. For her, who thought that she's someone unnecessary, rather than her effort, being told that she's needed by someone else was the most important thing.

Ikaruga too, even though she continued to develop and modify peaky weapons, she started doing it with a clear purpose in mind. Even if just a little bit, she started to rely on the other platoon members. She noticed that there are things that she can't resolve by herself.

The most remarkable change was in Ouka.

At first she repelled everyone, lived believing that she shouldn't rely on anyone, and now she was moving together with her comrades like this.

Before, she shot heinous criminals that should be arrested not listening to any explanations. The remnants of these days during which she was despised as 《Calamity》 have faded away considerably.

It could be said that her sharp edges have rounded, and as for herself, it seemed like she allowed herself to relax as well.

As for Takeru himself... I wonder if I changed, he thought.

Have I grown stronger? Have I grown more mature?

..................I wonder.

He stared at his palm, but he couldn't feel anything.

Even if he's gotten stronger, that would be Lapis' strength. His own performance might have not improved. Although his self-control and situational judgment might have improved, his skills haven't. In the first place, Takeru's swordsmanship skills have reached the limit of how far he can improve them alone. Because there was no other swordsman with skill comparable to his, it was difficult for him to improve.

Then, how about the mental aspect? Has his heart grown stronger? Was there any growth for him as a person?

Suddenly, he felt like his palms have blurred.

"...Kusanagi...?"

"............"

"...hey, Kusanagi!"

"Sorry, what is it?"

Seeing his reaction which indicated he didn't listen at all, Ouka made a stern expression.

"I-I said I'm sorry. You don't have to get angry about that..."

Although he said so with a fake smile, it seemed like Ouka wasn't particularly angry.

With the stern expression still on her face, Ouka intently looked into Takeru's face.

"...Kusanagi, you're tired aren't you?"

"He?"

"You have dark circles under your eyes. It's obvious that you're lacking sleep."

He was astounded.

Just as Ouka said, Takeru was lacking sleep. However, he didn't feel tired anyhow. If anything, since him lacking sleep was a daily occurrence, he was accustomed to it.

He wanted to explain that but... before he could, Ouka placed her hand on his forehead.

"It's not hot, but you shouldn't force yourself. Since a lot happened recently, you need to spend some time to rest a bit."

After placing a finger on Takeru's lips, Ouka scolded him lightly.

Somehow, being restrained by that gesture, he felt like he was being scolded by an older sister.

As for Takeru, 'not bad', he thought, and his cheeks were lightly dyed red.

He was relatively weak against older people.

Though, she wasn't older.

"I ain't forcing myself. Don't worry."

"But you... you've got a part-time job until morning as usual right? During the daytime you're studying, platoon activities in the evening, then a part-time job at night... with such a daily life, your body will eventually break down."

"I'll be careful not to have that happen but... well, if I rest myself once, won't I struggle to rebuild my life cycle afterwards? On the contrary, I'll end up tired because of that."

"Mgrr" Ouka growled.

It seemed like she puffed her cheeks a little bit.

Cute, he ended up thinking.

Ouka looked up at him from below with a worried gaze.

"...I have no intention of interfering with your privacy but... that's... I've heard that your household has a debt. Your parents too... are no longer there, right?"

She asked, Takeru scratched his cheek.

"Well, yeah. But it's not a big deal."

"W-what?! It is a big deal! Having to suffer through debt when your parents are no longer there is not a big deal?!"

"As compared to some other things... it's quite a dangerous world after all."

"...it can't be, but haven't you noticed your miserable upbringing yet? Even I think of myself as of unfortunate, but it doesn't go that far you know?"

"Unfortunate... I never thought of myself as of unfortunate. Although I'm not blessed, I think I live quite well. Look... hehe, I'm a man, and to be in a platoon with so many girls it makes me kinda hap——"

"I'm talking seriously here!"

She got angry again.

Ouka's attitude was different from usual, making Takeru confused.

Noticing the inconsistency as she raised her voice, Ouka averted her line of sight.

"No... I'm not really angry. It's just that I…"

She folded her hands in front of her chest and entwined her fingers.

"There's been many difficulties recently and... even if just for a little, I wanted to tell you... that you should rely on me."

"? Rely you say, for what?"

"That's... umm, if there's a debt, then let me do a part-time job to help..."

So what Ouka wanted to say, is that they should have a fund-raising.

While Takeru appreciated the offer, he shook his head rejecting it.

"I'm happy to hear that, but could you quit that kind of talk?"

"W-why?"

"Nn... it feels wrong to rely on comrades to help with money problems. Also, this is a problem I need to deal with myself somehow."

"...that's..."

"Sorry. But thanks."

With a smile, Takeru started walking and stretched. A sound of a siren could be heard from a distance. After hearing the report, Inquisition would come to recover the criminals.

When he looked back at Ouka, it seemed like she was worried again. This is where I have to reassure her, he thought.

"Well, it's just as you say though, I do need a little rest. I'll take a break from tomorrow's platoon activities, I'll take time off the part-time job as well."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I'd feel bad if I worry you any more than that. It makes me happy, thank you."

Takeru said as he faced Ouka with a smile on his face.

Probably relieved, strength left Ouka and she relaxed her shoulders.

"I see... not just one day, it would be good to rest two or three days. Oh, how about you go visit your little sister?"

"............yeah, that might be good."

"Is she living away from you?"

"Yeah, she's going to a normal school; a school in the north that has scholarship."

"I see. I too once had a little sister. Family is a great thing, it's good to cherish it. Oh right, do you have a photo or something? If you're not against it, I'd like to see her by all means."

"Sure, when there's a chance. I'll probably be called siscon again for saying it, but even I, her brother think she's very cute. A bit clumsy though."

"Hmm. Is she similar to you, Kusanagi?"

"Not much, I guess? I'm similar to our old man, and she's similar to our mother."

"Is that so... I want to meet her someday."

Ouka put on a rare, carefree smile.

Takeru felt faint guilt.

The next day.

Takeru who was resting from the platoon activities was greeted by the student council president, Hojishiro Nagaru and entered the kotatsu.

"You see this—, I've found it in a shop in downtown recently〜. Somehow—, it's a shop that tries to recreate old sweets—, apparently they reproduce them by finding recipes from old Japan〜. Inquisition also seems to be cooperating with them, they've been working on cultural conservation recently〜."

"...haa, is that so."

munch* *munch* *munch* *munch...

"Culture's a mysterious thing isn't it. In the past there were countries called China or America, but right now people can only live in sanctuaries. The people who survived passed down the culture of the land they lived in to make sure it survives, just like we are now. Things like ramen, or hamburgers? It's interesting."

"...indeedly."

munch* *munch* *munch* *munch...

"Is it tasty?"

"...well, yes. The feeling there is after drinking tea with it..."

"Yay, great〜. Kusanagi-kun loves anpan, so I thought you'll definitely like this one too—. Ouka-chan liked it as well right? Here〜this, a souvenir〜."

She said so, and handed him a paper bag with fried dough cakes with a huge smile.

Takeru accepted it in silence and held it in front of his chest.

"Haa〜that was delicious. Let's eat these together again sometime〜."

"..........."

"Then, with that done〜."

Nagaru raised her hand swiftly and said goodbye to Takeru with a smile.

"——Hey, wait, you midget."

Still under the kotatsu, veins appeared on Takeru's temple and he smiled. He gripped Nagaru's head strongly with one hand.

"Hoee—?"

"I didn't come here to drink tea with you dammit...!"

Takeru glared straight into her eyes.

"it's a joke, joke〜. I was just playing dumb〜."

"You definitely wanted to leave just now...! You've made us help with cleaning up after the Witch-Hunting Festival... don't think you'll escape now...!"

"Y-you shouldn't use such a tone when speaking to your senpai☆."

"Even if you act cutely, don't think I'll let you escape...!"

Takeru rotated Nagaru's head, and she let out "Aaa〜" as if air was coming out of her. After he ground her head for a while, they got down to business.

The 35th Test Platoon which resolved the problem with Mephistopheles was entrusted with post-processing after the Witch-Hunting Festival on behalf of the student council, and was unable to perform platoon activities for nearly a week.

But in return, they were promised a wide variety of information by Nagaru.

Nagaru sat on the opposite side from Takeru, and sipped her tea.

"The fact that Relic Eaters are Magical Heritages as well, you already know that right? Kusanagi-kun."

"Yeah. But the detailed circumstances and story are confidential..."

Hearing Takeru's words, Nagaru narrowed her eyes.

"Then, do you know why Mistilteinn is called a 'Twilight-Type'?"

"She... isn't it because Lapis' magic attribute is "Twilight"?"

"I too thought so at first. Other Relic Eaters are named after tyrants and criminals, I thought that her being different was weird. Have you ever heard the legends about Mistilteinn?"

"Does she have a history just like other Magical Heritages?"

"...it's just a fairy tale, for now. You know a little about the world of myths from your studies right?"

The mythical worlds. A different dimension in which magical creatures called "Gods" were living in.

Summoning magic allowed to temporarily call magical organisms from different dimensions at the cost of magic, and even God-level magical organisms were not an exception.

Greek mythology, Indian mythology, Celtic mythology, even Japanese mythology. The stories about the mythical worlds that have been passed to modern times, have been confirmed to exist.

Summoning gods to this world is currently impossible because of the overwhelming amount of magic required, but witches familiar with summoning magic are said to be able to feel their presence.

In the past, the ancient witches from all over the world have succeeded in communicating with the world of the gods, and it could be said to be the origin of summoning magic.

The names from the mythologies depended on the regions, and the anecdotes themselves differed depending on the regions, that's because the mythical world they contacted differed depending on the region.

The witches of the old were said to be able to hold conversations with the otherworldly gods.

Thanks to that, different beliefs have been born and spoken about. People of the old believed in their own significance because of the otherworldly gods existence.

Even for the same mythical worlds, different anecdotes and stories exist. After the means of conversing with the mythical gods has been lost, the lore has been crooked and changed in various ways.

Because of the inconsistency in faith, wars have broke out in various places. However, faith in those mythical worlds has been prohibited by Inquisition in modern times.

The lost-type Magical Heritages that remain, have strong relationships with the mythological worlds. Allegedly, things that have been created thanks to interference of the gods from mythological world aren't that rare.

"Mistilteinn is a weapon that appears in a Nordic mythology's fairy tale."

"...p-please wait a second. Umm, in other words, she's the same type of thing as Excalibur or Dáinsleif?"

"No, they are different. King Arthur's Excalibur and Högni's Dáinsleif are both Magical Heritages born in this world."

Unable to understand well what Nagaru said, Takeru could only tilt his head puzzled.

"What I want to say is, she's not something that used to be a Magical Heritage. The weapon called "Mistilteinn"... is something from a different world. It's a weapon that should exist only in the Nordic mythology's world."

....

Ha? That's what Takeru's face relayed.

"...t-that's impossible...right?"

"I think so too. If that's really Mistilteinn out of the legends, then she would be one of weapons Gods themselves used. A "Sacred Treasure"."

Nagaru was someone who wouldn't tell him an unconfirmed guess.

As she said that, Takeru felt confused.

"Certainly, it can be just something out of my delusions. But, anyhow... I can no longer afford to treat it as such."

Her eyes that usually made it seem like she's sleepy, have been sharply narrowed.

Takeru loudly swallowed his spit.

"I know what's the current situation of the world... and what's the Inquisition hiding. I'm prepared to disclose that information to you. In exchange, there is one condition."

She sipped her tea and grinned.

"...umm, can I ask something before that? President said that in exchange for 35th platoon's cooperation, you will provide a vast amount of information right?"

He directed the flow of conversation back to the original topic.

Nagaru made a gesture as if she was thinking, and soon said "Well, fine."

"I want to take over the Inquisition one day."

Bluntly, she stated her ambition.

He knew that she was ambitious from Mephisto's case, as well as from what Ouka said, so he wasn't that surprised. Still, he was astounded to hear her say that ambition of hers so bluntly.

Coincidentally, it was the same ambition Takeru once had.

"I have nothing against the forceful approach of Inquisition in order to confront the threats, our opponents are also very dangerous."

"…………"

"However, currently in the forbidden area, there are excessive actions directed towards the witches and that is the problem I'm concerned about. In particular, the Iron Maidens... these are past inhumane."

After placing a hand on her mouth, Nagaru observed Takeru's expression.

He unconsciously looked away from her.

"Why do you think Inquisition doesn't execute uncontrollable criminals, witches, and has them fall into sleep without any dreams?"

Takeru looked below, but Nagaru continued without regard to that.

"They're research subjects... it's a case of human experimentation. You can tell that just by thinking about it. The Witch Hunt War from 150 years ago... just how many witches have been put inside those Iron Maidens? The witches that were remnants after that war, the irregular-born witches, can you imagine just how many of them are there?"

He couldn't imagine it. However, Inquisition must have caught an unbelievable amount of them.

The Inquisition's facilities were scattered in various places. There were lots of places called 'forbidden areas'.

However, even for 150 years, there was no reason to make criminals sleep continuously.

Although Iron Maidens were devices that reduced the costs, the funds required to support each prisoner's life functions were not small.

Adding on to it, the same could be said about the innocent witches living inside forbidden areas.

Food, clothing and bed weren't all, medicines were also required. Even though the number of witches decreased in the modern times, around a thousand witches a year are sent to the forbidden area.

Thinking normally, they should be bursting, but in reality – that didn't happen.

In other words, the possibility that witches are being treated as experimental material is high.

That indicated it's been continued for a long time. The Ethics Committee has been inaugurated, and has finally denounced them. The Inquisition that's been always staying silent, reached a point where they could no longer work around it.

Even Takeru knew about that. His little sister was in that position as well.

"I believe that unless we overcome this situation, the coexistence between witches and humans will be impossible."

Nagaru smiled wryly towards him.

"In fact, my older sister was an irregular witch."

"?!"

As expected, even Takeru was surprised.

"At the time, my sister was ten years old. Her Phantom Instrument had suddenly appeared, and her magic power ran wild. Overflow Complex, I'm certain you've heard of that?"

He knew that disease's name.

Unlike those who were born from a witch's lineage, there was about a 20% probability that failures will occur with irregular witches.

One of the symptoms that was very rare, is Overflow Complex.

The internal organ called 'Phantom Instrument' is also referred to as 'the second heart', something essential for a witch to generate magic. It continues to emit magic which will course through the body just like blood, and does not overflow.

However, if there's a defect in the Phantom Instrument, it will release magic from the body mass regardless of the intention of the person in question. Although it's often harmless for witches, it's nearly poisonous to normal people.

"Because of that disease, my sister caused a magical disaster... a lot of people died. She herself tried to stop it, but the Phantom Instrument was damaged and she who just turned into a witch couldn't do anything about it. She was still a child after all."

"…………"

"When the magic power inside her body was exhausted, the disaster finally subsided, the Inquisition Board has designated her as S-class danger and she was imprisoned inside of an Iron Maiden."

"S-class danger designation?! Even though she hasn't killed anyone intentionally...?!"

Takeru raised his voice involuntarily. Originally, no matter how powerful they were, only the ones who are malicious murderers have an S-class danger designation.

And more than anything,

"isn't it possible for modern medicine to address the Overflow Complex?"

"Yup. It's a disease that can be treated and people don't have to be put to sleep. My sister didn't have any dangerous magical attributes, nor did she have an ancient attribute."

But, Nagaru continued.

"It's possible to deal with them, but those are unusual symptoms. Simply because of that, my sister has been treated as material for human experimentation."

She sipped her tea again.

"We received the report that my sister died one year after she was arrested. Her body was turned into ash and released into sea. According to the report, she was sick and died in her sleep, she died because it was discovered too late. Even I, as a seven year old child could see through a lie like that."

"…………"

"If she didn't kill anyone intentionally, then the danger evaluation should be low. And yet, she has been treated like a criminal, turned into a guinea pig and killed… it's not just my sister, there are many other witches who end up like that."

"And so, Student Council President decided to change Inquisition."

"Of course, but that's not the only reason. The thing about my sister was just the beginning. Well, I don't care if you either think that I invited you out of sympathy or that I have ulterior motives〜."

Takeru looked as she nonchalantly said that, and spat out a sigh.

He wondered why this person could talk about that past of hers in such a bright tone.

Nagaru's past was similar to Takeru's in many ways. Although her motive and methodology was different, just like Takeru in the past, she wanted to change the world for the same reason.

His little sister, Kiseki.

"The current status of Inquisition is that they have stimulated their enemies too recklessly. The reason their opponents have become more active recently are the inhumane conducts of the Inquisition. That white haired ghost… I think Ootori Sougetsu didn't make it this way for no reason. He has made a provocative situation with an intention to pull us in, is what I think."

"…the enemy. Is it Valhalla?"

She stared at him in silence.

"I'm afraid from here onward there's a fee. I want you to think about what I spoke about earlier and find some resolve. Next, is your turn."

Despite speaking as if she was in daze, she glared at Takeru sharply.

"You still have a secret you haven't told me, have you?"

Her line of sight was piercing through him, his breath stopped for a moment.

"Not just to me. You have something you don't want to talk about with the comrades from your platoon either. I wonder if it's any different with Suginami though... I'm not sure, but I feel that she knows."

"............"

"If I don't hear your secret from your own mouth, I won't be able to trust you. I am prepared to confide all I know to you. Are you... resolved to do the same?"

"............"

"It's not a resolution to bear something. It's a resolution to reveal everything."

A while after that, Takeru opened his mouth.

"...just how much do you know."

"What I know is not the problem here. It's about me, hearing it from your own mouth."

Once again, Takeru fell silent.

"It's not that having secrets is a bad thing. But the relationship I'll be trying to build from now on is fragile enough to break as soon as any of us keeps any secrets."

"............"

"My comrades aren't just the members of the student council. There isn't that many of them, but there's more people than you think, Kusanagi-kun. They are people whose ambition is to change this rotting Inquisition, and they are resolved to do so."

"............"

"I thought of becoming comrades with you. It might be consistent with our current partnership, but please think of our information exchange as the first step to future negotiations. As long as you have resolve to reveal everything, I won't mind disclosing all the information I have."

Nagaru waited for Takeru's reply.

At this moment, they were in the gray zone. Should they join the current Inquisition's side, or join the student council's side.

He grasped his pants in the kotatsu and faced down.

Although Nagaru was similar to Sougetsu, he always felt she was more human than he is. It wasn't judgment whether one was good or evil, it was that rather than leave everything to the Chairman, he could understand everything better with her. Certainly, it would benefit the platoon.

However, the secret Takeru was hiding, Kiseki's case was on entirely different level from normal.

That was why, if it was unknown, it would be better if it remained as such.

"I'm sorry. Can you wait with this for a while?"

"...hmm, I think this isn't something time is going to solve though."

"I know. But before telling everything to President, I want to tell the platoon members first. Also, I think I shouldn't decide it by myself."

As Takeru spoke what he honestly thought, Nagaru blinked a few times and smiled happily.

"You really think a lot about your comrades don't you～."

She said so nonchalantly and clapped her hands.

"I understand. Whenever you want, once you come back, I'll listen to your response."

Takeru bowed deeply and stood up from the kotatsu.

"In the end, let me give you a piece of advice."

When he was about to head back, Nagaru called out to him. Takeru turned his body towards her.

"——Be careful with Mistilteinn. If that thing is really one of these so-called "Sacred Treasures", then it's something too heavy for a single person to hold."

"...but...what should I do."

"Up until now it hasn't sought anything from you, but if by any chance something was to happen, don't comply with its request."

She made a slightly stern expression and narrowed her eyes.

"That will definitely... not end well."

What did those words mean, at this time, Takeru didn't know yet.

He left the second student council room and closed the doors of the data preparation room.

While feeling a haze in his chest, Takeru looked down.

Under any normal circumstances, Kiseki's existence must be absolutely kept secret, under the condition from the Inquisition that he doesn't reveal anything, he was allowed to visit her.

He stared at his own palm and bit his lip.

If Nagaru's ambition is realized, the treatment of witches will change for better.

He too, agreed with her ideas. She too had a past similar to his, and he could sympathize with her.

But there was a crucial difference between them. Unlike Nagaru's sister that was sacrificed, Inquisition would never let Kiseki off.

Unlike the Overflow Complex, undoubtedly, Kiseki was a real danger.

Going against the Inquisition without any solution that would allow Kiseki to be released was not a good idea.

"..................Kiseki."

Not knowing what should he do, he called out his little sister's name.

That's when he suddenly felt someone's gaze on him.

On the left, near the stairs at the innermost corridor someone was standing there and looking towards him.

A female student wearing a uniform.

"——!"

It was someone familiar to him.

She had a brown tail tied in a pony-tail and a light-hearted, kind look.

Without a doubt. That was,

"Yoshimizu...?!"

Takeru inadvertently rubbed his eyes to make sure he wasn't seeing things.

The next time he opened his eyes, Yoshimizu was no longer there.

Instead... there was a single boy standing there.

"...th..at's..."

That boy too, was Takeru's acquaintance.

Kirigaya Kyouya. The captain of the 15th test platoon... the one that was wiped out by Haunted.

Kyouya glared towards Takeru.

"Kyouya!"

Without thinking, Takeru rushed towards him. After approaching at full speed, he stood in front of him.

"J-just when were you discharged? A while ago when I went to hospital..."

"..........."

"...a-anyway, that's great. You look health...y..."

Telling him that he looks healthy was a slip of tongue, it was too rushed.

However, speaking just about his body, he did look healthy.

Kyouya's legs. He lost both them when he was crushed by the rubble.

But no matter how he looked at it, Kyouya had them both.

At first Takeru thought they were prosthetics, but it wasn't so. He knew that those are legs of flesh and blood.

"...you... legs...why..."

As he stared in wonder, Kyouya looked away from him and passed by his side.

Takeru chased after him in a hurry.

"Wait a second, there's still something I want to ask you."

"..........."

"What happened to Yoshimizu? I wasn't told anything about her when I asked Seelies. Her hospital room was changed, if possible I want to pay her a visit.——"

He casually placed a hand on Kyouya's shoulder.

It was just a faint touch.

But Kyouya smacked Takeru's hand away.

Involuntarily, Takeru was stunned.

"——Don't touch me you traitor...!"

Kyouya looked towards Takeru with a furious expression and said so. Traitor? What does that mean?

Not knowing why Kyouya was angry, Takeru stood there dumbfounded.

Then Kyouya walked away down the hallway at brisk pace.

Not feeling like chasing him, Takeru watched his back as he left.

"...what was that..."

Unconvinced, he rubbed his hands.

After that, he tried asking the Seelie ward's nurse, but he wasn't told of Yoshimizu Akira's whereabouts. As for Kyouya, not only wasn't he discharged but it was made as if he was never a patient in there, it was a complete blank-out.

Although he couldn't help but think that it's strange, but inside of Takeru a resolution to ask Kyouya himself was born.

The Glossary

Highway Fairy (ハイウエイフエアリー) - It's written as (疾走) meaning "Gallop".

Chapter 2 - Little Sister

"——Research target's cardiac arrest is imminent. Entering preparations for injection of hihiirokane."

In the forbidden area within the prison's deepest special experiment control room, there was a girl shown on the monitor's screen. One of the Regins has reported to Ootori Sougetsu.

The one reflected in the monitor was a restrained Kusanagi Kiseki. A number of tubes were connected to her and dozens of light-emitting chains were wound around her body.

"Hmhmm... today's Kiseki-chan seems quite tenacious, doesn't she."

While staring at the monitor from staircase that was near the middle of the control room Sougetsu smiled as if it has piqued his curiosity.

Around him there were the chosen Seelies who were busy operating the room's computer, suddenly the control room has gotten busy.

"It's been more than thirty hours ever since the medication was applied. It has exceeded the lethal dose of a normal human being by over a hundred times. The poison seems unlikely to be effective... or maybe it's just the demons... what do you think, Kurogane-kun?"

Sougetsu placed a hand on his chin and called out to Hayato who was right beside him.

Hayato didn't even look at him, and just stared at the monitor.

"Something's different from usual... I've got a bad feeling. I've heard that she met with Kusanagi Takeru, did anything happen?"

"Nope? Not really. Kusanagi-kun was just a little distraught, Kiseki-chan was docile as she listened to him. Whenever she meets with him, her mental status mysteriously stabilizes and her power's activity also dulls. Honestly, holding her is quite costly, so it's a great help having them meet."

Hayato silently glared at Sougetsu.

"Got complaints? This treatment has been continuing for five years already. I don't mind if you tell me some about the ethics, but we don't have a way to control her so it can't be helped right?"

"............"

"Even for me, having to kill an innocent girl time after time again is painful. But if we don't do it, that alien thing won't come out. We must drag out that alien thing out of her and kill and kill and kill it until its exhausted. If we fail to do so, the world might perish."

Sougetsu smiled thinly to Hayato.

"The one who caught Kiseki-chan five years ago was you, you should know best just how dangerous is she right?"

"............I am aware of it."

"Don't worry. It will end soon. Geez, Alchemist sure does work fast on the things that interest them, it's a great help. In just two months... even though we were working on it frantically, they accomplished it in such a short amount of time, there's a lot to alchemy isn't there."

Sarcastically, Sougetsu praised the Alchemist and looked merrily at Kiseki who was displayed on the monitor.

"Haa, if there's a God out there that isn't one of the magical organisms, I wonder why would he drop such an organism here. Is he trying to eradicate human race for arrogance? Geez."

《"The observation target has entered cardiac arrest. It will re-awaken soon. Transitioning to first-class alertness. All Inquisition officers are asked to move assuming any possibility."》

After that report was transmitted, the people who were moving around busily all stopped moving all at once.

Sougetsu and Hayato stared at the monitor in silence.

Kiseki went limp and bowed down. All the vital signs displayed on the instruments have stopped. Starting with brain, everything has died completely.

The change happened immediately after.

Although she should have died, Kiseki faintly opened her eyelids.

《"...aa......aaa..."》

Her opened eyes were hollow, drool was dripping out of her mouth.

Sougetsu went down to the bottom from the stairs of the control room and grabbed the microphone.

"Ohh, Kiseki-chan. Good morning. How's your mood after waking up?"

He greeted her as if it was a refreshing morning and smiled like a Cheshire Cat.

Kiseki, who was surrounded by black walls looked up at the speakers from which sound flowed.

Her hollow pupils were unchanged, unfocused. Her lips were trembling and drool flowed without stopping.

The person in question herself didn't understand what kind of situation she was in. Only the discomfort after having her heart forcibly restarted echoed through her.

"...AAAa......"

A lifeless voice began to leak out, it was like a meaningless moaning of a baby.

Inside of her there were only restless thoughts and a vague sense of fear.

Large. Way too large. The flesh her soul was settled in was 『way too wide』.

Its size intimidated Kiseki and urged her.

Open.

Open open open.

You're not fit for this vessel. It's too large for you.

It wasn't a voice, the whereabouts of her soul was screaming.

This place is too cold. It's too wide. That's why open it, release it all.

Intimidated by her body, tears have spilled from Kiseki's pupils.

This compulsion always came after she died.

——— Kusanagi Kiseki ———

The power she held was extremely alien. Whenever that power is released outside, whatever she touches is converted into a part of Kusanagi Kiseki. The erosion spreads endlessly, and it is assumed that it will spread endlessly swallowing the world were she left alone.

Kiseki herself couldn't control this power, it was referred to as an undetermined ancient property called 『Demon』. The reason it is undetermined whether it is an ancient property, is the fact that Inquisition has concluded that she holds no magic power inside her. Whereas magic power is naturally composed of particles, Kiseki's power was a substance that forms flesh and blood.

So to speak, Kiseki's power itself, was her body.

"...aa...uu...uuu..."

Because of that, Kiseki was unable to die.

Even if she temporarily dies, she will surely revive. Even if she's strangled, corrupted by poison, her heart is pierced, her head blown away, or burnt to cinders——Kiseki will definitely revive herself. Her power rejects death.

The reason Inquisition regularly kills her every month is to release the power that is accumulating inside of her.

If the power isn't released on regular basis, it overwhelms her soul and she runs out of control.

Whenever she is killed by outside factors, the power rejecting death overflows from inside her. The overflowing power is then dissolved by an anti-magic material, hihiirokane and quenched all at once.

Her older brother, Takeru, didn't know this. He knew that Inquisition is experimenting to find a way to control Kiseki. But he didn't know that she's been repeatedly killed and revived.

Kiseki herself didn't want to tell her brother this. Were she to tell him this, he definitely wouldn't forgive Inquisition and go back to how he was before. Were he to rebel against Inquisition... he would definitely be killed.

That's why Kiseki has chosen to endure the suffering.

"...Onii...cha..."

Unable to articulate properly, Kiseki called her brother. She called for her only ally there was.

With all of her hatred, with all of her love.

Wanting to meet her brother. Wanting to touch her brother. If he is there with her, Kiseki can withstand the suffering. She can endure the life that's more painful than death.

"nii...ts..cha..."

She wanted to be by her brother side. This place is too wide, it's too cold. I want to feel that person's warm fingertips, hear that person's voice.

It's all right, he will come to meet me again.

Because, for Onii-chan I'm the only one——

Unexpectedly. In her mind floated an illusion of a woman with sunset-colored hair.

"————"

Beside the woman whom she never seen, there was a figure of her brother.

The two joined hands, and started walking together.

Kiseki tried to stretch her hand towards the figure of her leaving brother, but since her hands were restrained she couldn't move.

"Don...'t...go..."

She called in vain, the illusion Kiseki saw has mercilessly disappeared.

In silence, Kiseki's soul sank into the darkness of loneliness.

Inside of that darkness, what wrapped around her soul was her own heresy. That heresy told her, 'open'.

"………………………………………………………………………………………………"

Kiseki made a wish.

She wished to go outside and meet with her brother.

And that wish, was fulfilled by the power she held.

——From Kiseki's body, an unstoppable power overflowed.

"The Gleipnir fractured! The observation's target has torn off the Iron Maiden!"

"Hurry up and inject the hihiirokane into her! Stop her movement somehow!"

"...not good! The amount released is much higher than usual! ...why did such a thing..."

In the forbidden area's deepest prison's special experiment control room a loud siren resounded and warning light has shone from the lamps.

A number of Regins were running around in a hurry, one could see in just a glance that it was an abnormal situation.

"——The second, and third partition wall erosion has started! It's the first time it's been eroded at such speed."

"The partition walls are 10 meters thick, for them to be eroded in such a short amount of time...!"

"Chairman, we won't hold out any longer!"

Ootori Sougetsu stood right in front of the monitor in the control room.

He looked at the cause of the chaos reflected in the monitor, and gave orders to his subordinates.

"Two Dragoon-equipped platoons are to hold back the target, after that you are to work on reconstruction of the partition walls."

"It's not someone we can do anything about...! Like this they're just going to die in vain!"

"We can't afford letting her go up there. It is a necessary sacrifice."

"It's for times like this that you have the underground facility right?! Open the hatch and drop her down to the mantle!"

"No can do. We can't let that thing die yet. In the first place, that monster isn't something that will die just by being dropped into magma. We absolutely need to recover it."

With a cool expression, Sougetsu coldly stared at the monitor.

In the back, Kurogane Hayato stared at the monitor as well and pulled out a Relic Eater from his pocket. Sougetsu moved his line of sight to Hayato, and narrowed his eyes.

"Kurogane-kun, the situation is completely different from five years ago. That thing has without a doubt grown."

"...I'll kill it until it stops going berserk."

"You might die?"

"I don't care."

Making a prompt decision, Hayato confirmed the remaining bullets and turned around on his heel.

"...Chairman."

His feet has stopped in front of the door and Hayato called out to Sougetsu without turning around.

Even in the noisy control room, the unpleasant and sombre voice could be clearly heard.

"If by any chance you use that monster for anything else other than a deterring force, I'm going to respond to that firmly."

"...oh-hoh."

"Depending on your thoughts, and how you use it I might regard you as a heretic."

"I'll be prepared."

After that sentence, Hayato left the control room.

He walked down a simple corridor made out of anti-magical material.

As his footsteps echoed in it, Hayato wirelessly connected to the control room.

"All Spriggans are to fall back. After I rush in, everyone is to weld the partitions. Don't let anyone in, don't let anyone out."

《"B-but... that's..."》

"Hurry up."

At the same time as he turned off the wireless, he arrived at the first partition wall.

One after another, the moment countless walls have opened, the variant has flowed from the back of the corridor.

It seemed like a living, red tsunami. The tsunami wasn't a liquid, and had a meaty texture. There were mouths and eyes in the numerous places on the meat, there were teeth and horns growing all over, it seemed like a stirred mass of various organisms mixed into one.

The moment that tsunami attacked the wall's anti-magic material, it has changed into part of its own meat.

However, the only place it avoided was around Hayato, as if it was frightened of him.

Hayato proceeded into the waves of irregular shape without any hesitation, and confronted it.

"————, ——————————."

The source of the tsunami itself lowered its hands lifelessly and faced towards the ceiling. Its throat moved, and an eerie sigh leaked out.

"............"

After experiencing hell many times, confronting various threats before, Hayato was prepared to die as he confronted the presence in front of him. His mind was calm, his body didn't tremble, his skin was tingling and felt a stabbing pain. The air that wrapped around him was crying, and the atmosphere itself let out a horrible scream.

At least, it looked like a human. At least it looked like an organism.

Be that as it may, the nature of that existence could only be called a distortion. Calling it "chaos" would be fitting. It could be called to be personification of all the hatred, all the violence in this world.

Hayato remained expressionless, he only stared at the presence that hasn't noticed him and tilted its neck towards the ceiling.

"It's been five years huh, since we last confronted each other."

As an extremely rare occurrence, complexity has colored Hayato's voice.

He probably didn't expect a reply, it was as if he was speaking to himself. He put a finger on the trigger.

"I'm fine with you hating me, fearing me, despising me."

"——————"

"I won't apologize to you."

"————————————"

"That's why you too, have no need to apologize for trying to killing me."

Hayato closed his eyes, and quietly spun the words of power.

"Summis desiderantes affectibus..."

The Relic Eater that was bearing the name of a tyrant has started emitting light, under his feet appeared a jet-black magical circle clad in lightning.

Jet-black particles covered Hayato's body.

"...Malleus Maleficarum"

Clad in jet-black armor, Hayato confronted the variant.

The main body of the tsunami in front of him faced towards him. The meat tsunami stopped moving at the same time, and the number of variant's eyes embedded in it creepily focused on Hayato.

And then, all mouths moved at once, articulating a voice.

『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』 『"Onii-chan"』

"...where is... Onii-chan?"

The chaos laughed. It looked at Hayato and laughed.

Chaos forced into a human, with a human-like sad expression and shedding tears, it laughed.

A few hours later.

"Ohhh... this is horrible. I'm glad I made a basement. The things above are too important."

Sougetsu walked carefully over the wreckage of the partition wall, speaking to himself.

The innermost prison was in terrible condition, many-layered partition walls have all collapsed, the instruments on the wall and anti-magic material have all turned into garbage.

As he walked through the facility that looked as if a large disaster happened in it, Sougetsu discovered a certain person.

"Heeey, Kurogane-kuun. You alive?"

Because there was no reaction to his call, Sougetsu tried to wait a few seconds.

A huge tile moved heavily and was raised up.

From the bottom of the rubble, Kurogane Hayato's head appeared.

He seemed to be in Witch Hunter form. Dressed in a jet-black futuristic armor.

His armour was in tatters, and he himself had wounds all over his body.

"As expected of the strongest Dullahan, tenacious aren't you."

As Sougetsu cheerfully applauded him, Hayato's pupils ran amok and glared at him.

"...what's Kusanagi Kiseki's current location?"

"Oh, I was surprised. To think she could grow wings and fly, even I didn't expect that."

"I apologize. I allowed her to escape."

Hayato dropped the tile and apologized to Sougetsu in low voice.

"What are you saying, it was great, splendid. Thanks to your struggle her going berserk was somehow suppressed. When she got out, it seemed like most of her sanity has returned."

"............"

"However, if we don't find her as soon as possible, this town... or rather, the world will be in danger. As expected, even I wouldn't let such an uncontrollable thing go. You need to hurry and chase after it."

"Understood."

"Also, Kirigaya-kun is also chasing after her, go together with him. For the Kiseki-chan as she is now, the two of you should be enough, right?"

"...it's too early to use Kirigaya in actual combat. His Relic Eater isn't a docile one. It's trait to act by itself is too strong."

"Whaat, I have no intention to make him fight so don't worry. Also, he's excellent when it comes to investigation, isn't he?"

Sougetsu didn't seem to put up a hard stance, but Hayato squinted giving up.

After that Sougetsu closed the topic, and raised his arms high up.

"Hee〜, even so."

"............"

"...HAHAHA! What to do... with this. I need to consult with the Budget Committee."

With a strangely refreshing expression, he turned towards the partially-destroyed facility.

"Well, we plan to move her to a Alchemist's new facility anyway. This vast solitary confinement will become useless then."

Thinking of the future policies, Sougetsu put a hand on his chin.

Although the platoon activities generally started at the same time as the morning lessons ended, everyone was free to either rest or do the activities.

It was Saturday. The entire city was crowded.

Since the Christmas was nearing, red and green decorations could be seen all over.

Because of the regulations, religious practices have been banned, but things like Christianity or Buddhism which were strongly rooted in people from ever since old times were allowed unless magical rituals, or missionary solicitation work has been performed.

Even though the amount of churches and temples have decreased and there's less than there were before Witch-Hunt War, not all was lost.

Nevertheless, the old Japan's customs weren't directly inherited intact.

"...this is Ootori. Waiting at the target's predicted emergence point. Everyone, status report."

Staying in the shade of a leading restaurant's sign, Ouka communicated with her comrades through the wireless device attached to her neck. She wasn't in uniform but dressed in a winter coat similar to a female suit like that of an OL. Strangely, that suit suited a high school student making her seem like a capable woman.

Currently, the 35th Test Platoon was performing something undercover. They trailed the target while making sure they aren't found out. Since they would be most likely noticed in AntiMagic Academy's uniforms, not only Ouka but all other members have disguised themselves as well.

《"Haa, haa... nice, amazing legs... a bit more like this, won't you bend over? I want to see your breasts peek out."》

"...Suginami. Do it seriously."

《"It's fine it's fine, side benefits. It took time to prepare such outfits. You don't need to monitor me for things like this, instead you should be grateful."》

"...are you properly looking for the objective?"

《"It's okay. The field of view is wide like this."》

Ouka raised her line of sight, and stared at someone standing near the middle floor of the building across the street.

Ikaruga was standing on the gondola used by window cleaners, she was clad in working clothes and had a yellow helmet on her head. She stared through the binoculars, drooling.

She totally looked like a pervert.

Steeling herself, she spoke through the communication device at the nape of her neck once again.

"Saionji and... the bonus. Are you two ready?"

《"Aren't I one of the main members?!"》

Immediately after, Mari's harsh voice sounded making Ouka's ear start ringing.

"Don't yell like that, people around you are going to get suspicious."

《"Come onn! Why do only Usagi-chan and I have to wear such outfits?!"》

With that said, Ouka looked towards Mari and Usagi who were standing in front of the smartphone shop. The two were right in front of the store dressed in Santa outfits.

It was the so-called mini-skirt Santa.

"...it can't be helped, can it. My gaze is too sharp and Suginami would seem like a bar hostess."

《"Who the hell is a hostess."》

"I haven't said you are."

After Ikaruga's voice retorting, Usagi's trembling voice could be heard.

《"I-it is-s coldd... w-why is the skirt s-so short...?"》

Despite feeling cold, Usagi was giving away tissues to passer-bys.

The Santa outfit Usagi was clad in had exposed a lot of her body, and on top of it, the size was a bit too small for her, especially the parts around her breasts.

The men who passed by her all without exception have taken the tissues from her, and after moving away they still turned around to look at her.

《"............"》

Seeing that, Mari put a hand on her chest.

After that, she stared at Usagi's body.

"...?

《"...? What is it, Nikado."》

《"――This is... inequality!!"》

Mari fell on her knees on spot, suffering a huge setback.

Ikaruga who perfectly saw it through the binoculars shouted joyfully.

《"It's all okay, there's a demand for that! You're properly handing the tissues out!"》

《"That's not the problemmm! It makes me seem miserable!"》

《"You have my guarantee! The guys who've gotten a tissue from you will properly use the tissues with you in mind!"》

《"Uwaann! That's disgusting, stop it!"》

"You three, cut this out and stop taking actions that make you stand out!"

Involuntarily Ouka herself has yelled and somehow managed to silence her comrades.

"Geez... Kusanagi, can you hear me? Are you all right? You haven't moved for a while now."

She took a breath and looked at Takeru.

In the back, behind Mari and Usagi who were handing out tissues.

There stood someone in a costume of something unknown which looked like a bear or an anteater.

While the two girls were approaching customers, the costume didn't move from under the shop's window. Ouka glared at the costume for a while, then said in undertone.

"...Kusanagi! Can you hear me?!"

The costume twitched and bounced up, after which it started looking around restlessly.

After reminding itself where was it, the costume showed Ouka thumbs up in a hurry.

"You should be the one giving instructions to your subordinates in the first place, what's up with your lack of spirit?"

After hearing her angry voice, the costume... Takeru bowed his head in what seemed to be an apology.

"Good grief." Ouka shook her head.

Today's target was relatively dangerous.

The target was drying plants that had magic dwelling in them, and was dealing with them as drugs after processing them into powder.

A natural Magical Heritage narcotic, having small amounts of magic mixed in one's body gives one a large amount of pleasure, it's dangerous stuff that induces disabilities caused by magic power. The trade with it has become more active in recent years, turning into a major problem.

In order to catch the one behind the Dealers, they can't act alone, that's the information Nagaru had provided them with. They didn't know how many people he'd bring, but they had to act smart and concentrate to make sure there were no sacrifices.

She felt a touch of uncertainty considering everyone's lack of ability to concentrate.

《"——He came. Just as we've been informed, black limousine."》

"?! Are you sure?"

《"Yeah. The plate's number has changed but... fufu, it's been replaced just recently. Such amateur tricks won't deceive me."》

Ouka caught her breath and spoke to Mari, Usagi, and Takeru.

"First, I'll be the one to approach... you three, be careful. Make sure not to act suspiciously."

《"R-r-rroger that."》

《"I know I know."》

The costume too, has shown her thumbs-up.

Ouka mingled with the passer-bys and walked towards the car.

People have come out from the luxury car.

There were two of them.

Two people... less than we expected.

While approaching the car, Ouka glanced sideways, taking a glimpse of them.

One of them was the Dealer who was their target. He was wearing the clothes that suggested he was being lucrative.

The other man seemed like a subordinate. He seemed like a thug you can find anywhere.

However, as Ouka passed by the car, one more person – a man appeared from inside. After grasping the door swiftly a man dressed in black has come out.

A two-meters tall man who wore a silk hat on his head and held a stick in his hand.

He looked like a magician.

Ouka thought that he was weird and was about to look away, at that moment.

She saw something on the man's wrist.

A blood red tattoo depicting a butterfly.

In the center of the tattoo a D letter could be seen.

...this guy!

Ouka was familiar with this tattoo.

He belonged to an organization that she devastated when she was in EXE, it was called "Red Butterfly's Insect Cage". It traded with people who were holding magic power in them, a trafficking organization. In order to nurture them, it bred the witches and sorcerers they caught. They were nasty guys who did it in order to mass-produce children that held magic power in them.

The tattoo of a butterfly was a proof that he was one of that organization's members.

She didn't think that one of the survivors would be in contact with the drug dealers.

the Dealer took out a cigar after coming out and had his subordinate light it for him. The man in the silk sat who stood standing next to him quietly made a thin smile and spoke to the Dealer.

After passing by their side Ouka spoke in undertone.

"Everyone raise your vigilance. The man in the silk hat has a B-class danger designation."

《"Ehh?!!"》

《"...know any details about it?"》

Usagi was surprised, and Mari asked calmly.

"He's called 『The Magician of Hamelin』, he's purchasing people for 『Red Butterfly's Insect Cage』. There's no doubt, he has a D character on his tattoo. Although he isn't a big deal as a witch, he has a bizarre way of fighting where he adds the modern weapons to the equation."

《"...『Red Butterfly's Insect Cage』 eh. That den of scum, is it."》

"You know about it?"

《"Of course."》

"It can't be... did you work with them before?"

《"...you might mean no offense, but even now, I'm gonna get angry."》

"...sorry."

《"The only contracts I undertook were ones for sabotaging their facilities. Also, they were selling people by using Valhalla's name... Valhalla might be heretic, but there are lines they won't cross."》

As Mari spoke in a dispirited voice, Ouka only added "My bad.".

Hearing the apology, Mari immediately fixed her attitude.

《 "If the Dealer is in contact with the remnants of that, I can't overlook this either. I joined Inquisition in order to bring judgment to guys like that."》

"Agreed. The risk is high, but I'll pass on retreating after seeing this."

《"Araa, how rare to see you two agree like that eh? Then I think you should release the Gleipnir's controls."》

"............"

《"If you do that, then I'll forgive you for the remark earlier?"》

"...... I get it, fine. The strategy is as planned. First we'll locate their base. If it happens to turn into a battle, cover us with the defensive magic. Rather than platoon members, focus on protecting the civilians."

《"Roo〜ger♪."》

I wanted to say that at least once, said Mari. Ouka spat out a sigh.

"Are there any problems, Kusanagi?"

After hearing Ouka, Takeru clad in the costume shook his hands and legs exaggeratedly and shown some shadow boxing.

Let's do this, is what it seemed to mean.

Ouka turned right in silence. Immediately after, she glanced at the target's present state from behind a building.

After finishing a cigar, he seemed to start moving.

I leave it to you three.

Encouraging herself, Ouka clenched her fist.

As Ouka monitored the target from behind the building, the tension of the people wearing Santa outfits and animal costume reached its peak.

Target was coming in their direction.

Their job was to put a transmitter on the target. With traffic like that, it was possible that the civilians might suffer casualties, and so, the plan was to have him guide them to their hideout with a transmitter.

According to the information from the Student Council President, other platoons seemed to have followed the Dealer before, but they were lost in the middle and was unable to find the hideout's location.

It was unknown whether a Magical Heritage was used, but it must have been advanced derangement.

If it came down to that, although the approach they used was retro, it was the best method to use to find out the hideout's location.

——— Operation Start ———

Costume-clad Takeru started handing balloons to the children.

Since there was a large shop nearby, three children who were passing by with perfect timing have ran up to him.

"Waaa! Anteaterbear costume! Ahaha what an annoying facee!"

"Everyonee, there's an anteaterbear here!"

"Waaii! Kick him hard! Send him rolling!"

Even as he was being kicked, Takeru was fooling around exaggeratedly and got in the way of the traffic. The place had suddenly gotten noisy, and the passer-bys started staring at Takeru. The target too, has faced towards him.

Although it seemed like a good distraction, the Silk Hat alone wasn't distracted by Takeru. It would be hard to put a transmitter unnoticed like this.

Hence, they switched to plan B.

"Usagi-chan, gooo."

"M-me??"

"You're the one from whom men take them, come on, hurry."

With a smile Mari handed the tissues to passer-bys and somewhat casually forced the work on Usagi.

With no choice, Usagi was pushed in front of the Dealer.

"...u-umm."

"Huh?"

Usagi approached the target.

the Dealer looked away from Takeru and stared at Usagi.

"E-eh, w-we're c-currently in the middle of a campa..."

"Hyuu!"

After being glared at by the Dealer, Usagi was frozen stiff.

Although she had overcome the tension that appeared during battle, she was still getting tense when experiencing this kind of thing.

It was a wrong choice to have her try.

However, Usagi had a different weapon.

《"——Now! Offer it to him!"》

Ikaruga's voice rang out in Usagi's ears.

Usagi closed her eyes, and stretched both of her hands holding a tissue to the Dealer.

Inevitably, Usagi's chest was sandwiched between her arms.

It was an attack no man could avoid.

the Dealer saw it, Usagi's pointlessly large boobs.

"This... please take it!'

With a momentum as if she was passing a love letter and a bright red face, Usagi held out the tissue to him.

——With this, he fell!

Everyone thought so, however.

the Dealer let out a "hmph" and passed by Usagi's side.

《"Suginami! It didn't work!"》

《"...such a thing, it can't be."》

Both Ouka and Ikaruga were horrified. At this rate the Dealer would leave just like that.

It seemed like there was no way out at the moment, that's when Ikaruga cried out in the communicator.

《"Wait... Nikaido! A follow-up please!"》

"Eeeeh, even though Usagi-chan couldn't make it, I still have to try?"

《"It's fine, if my intuition is correct, it'll go well!"》

Ikaruga desperately persuaded her, and Mari reluctantly obeyed her.

Desperate, she focused and moved in front of the Dealer.

With a keen, fake smile she held out a tissue to him.

"It's BU〜. We're currently holding a campaign. If you'd like, here〜♪."

With a natural behaviour like that made it seem there's no doubt that she had experience doing part-time jobs, Mari attacked.

Just like Usagi did before, she exposed her chest unnaturally (it's not being taken).

Deep inside, Mari thought it wouldn't be received, however.

"...sure, I'll take it."

And somehow, he took it.

"Thank you very muuch～♪ (*why?*)."

《"I see——so the target is in the flat faction after all! And to extreme even!"》

"......, i-it's BU～♪ (*I'm not happy about that at allllll!!*)."

Even though she felt uncomfortable, Mari still smiled and handed tissues to other people.

The strategy was successful. A transmitter was embedded in the pocket tissue and would lead them to the hideout.

Ouka moved her body from behind the building and started to track the Dealer.

When the Dealer moved a few steps away from Mari after accepting a tissue from her, the Silk Hat has suddenly stopped him by grabbing his shoulder.

"——!"

Ouka's face turned anxious. The Silk Hat whispered something into the Dealer's ear. the Dealer took out the pocket tissue he was given by Mari and passed it to him.

"Not good!"

She started to run, she sprinted through and avoided the crowd.

The Silk Hat's mouth distorted, he has thrown away the tissue and vigorously looked back.

In his hand——appeared a submachine gun he had concealed.

"Nikaido Mari!! Kusanagi!"

As Ouka shouted, the first to move was Kusanagi. While still wearing an animal costume he stood in front of Mari and Usagi, to protect them he spread his arms.

Mari too has immediately perceived an abnormality and has struck the ground.

Immediately after that, the Silk Hat has squeezed the trigger.

A continuous gunfire.

"———, 《"Aurora Field"》!"

Late by a moment, Mari activated her magic.

As to enclose both the passer-bys and Takeru, a space was distorted with colors of rainbow. The bullets that were released from the submachine gun slowed down the moment they reached the rainbow space as if they entered water.

Both the Takeru's and the others' movement has visibly slowed as if it was in slow motion.

Between the rainbow space and the normal space an obvious time difference was born.

Mari released the magic in an instant and exhaled.

At the same time, the people around were surprised by the change in the flow and fell down.

"...Takeru, are you okay?!"

Before she even asked, Takeru showed her thumbs-up.

"You did well, both of you!"

Ouka caught up entering the scene and aimed her handgun's muzzle at the Silk Hat. He looked at her and laughed eerily.

Did he set something up...?!

She found out what was it in an instant, under Takeru's feet she saw the bullets that fell to the ground.

A wooden... bullets?

But that wooden bullet has expanded in no time, a human eye and a mouth appeared on it, and its form has changed into that of a bulb.

Ouka had a rough idea what was it.

"!!! ——Everyone block your earsss!!"

She immediately yelled and covered her ears with both hands.

That moment, a number of distortions ran through the bulb, and with an expression as if it was speechless it has raised a spine-chilling intense scream.

《Mandragora》

It screamed if pulled out, those who heard it scream in agony receive a significant mental damage, if one keeps listening they would become crippled, this lower magical organism could possibly kill.

The Silk Hat used the wooden bullet's material as a catalyst and triggered summoning magic.

Although alone it's not much of a threat, a number of them was often used.

With this number, the passers-bys would be dead in a minute.

The Silk Hat pushed the Dealer's back and escaped into a black alley.

As cries of agony resounded throughout the main street, Ouka shouted into the intercom loud enough to hurt her throat.

"We'll handle these things! Kusanagi, chase them!"

After Ouka shouted, Kusanagi stripped off his costume.

"——'aight!!"

After giving a lively answer, Takeru followed the three men into the back alley while still plugging his ears.

After running into the dark alley behind the scene, rushed through a disgustingly dark space even though it was daytime.

Weird, it's too dark.

He determined that it was clearly abnormal, drawn the sword from his waist and started to walk carefully.

This abnormal darkness, he must have stepped into the Silk Hat has constructed.

"Everyone, can you hear me?"

《"————"》

Even as he tried to talk into the intercom, it only produced intense sounds, he couldn't tell what's what from that.

Apparently, this barrier had a capability of neutralizing the information-sharing devices.

Realizing that he stepped into the enemy's territory, Takeru readied himself for battle.

He sharpened his nerves and walked carefully through the back alley. He only heard the sound of droplets going down from the pipe that extended from the wall and the sound of his own footsteps. In this space that was isolated from the world, all other sounds have been erased.

Falling to the illusion of circling in the same place all the time, Takeru has gotten even more nervous.

He activated the Soumatou and rather than through vision, he tried to discern enemy's position after sharpening his auditory sense.

Takeru heard a sound much different from that of a normal human and felt faint flow of wind.

Eventually, he was able to pick up certain sound.

This is... gunfire... and screams?

Albeit faint, he heard screams of men and voices begging for help.

Although he didn't know what was the current situation, Takeru went to the sound's source at brisk pace.

? This wall...

The sound has been interrupted in the middle of his progression, but right beside the wall he felt something amiss.

When he tried to cut it with his sword, and saw the space was distorting as the passage has opened.

And when he continued to move further.

"...w-what are...you...!"

A genuinely terrified voice of a man could be heard.

"A witch...?! Are you like me... no... you're different... what is this... what are youu...?!"

A sloshing sound followed that.

And then, a steady sound as if something was walking. The voice, was probably that of the Silk Hat's.

Has he encountered something, and got scared?

With a possibility of a new threat, Takeru's heart started racing.

"Stop! Don't come! Hiii... don't come!"

A frightened voice. And at the same time, a sound of something steadily walking.

"M-monsterrr! T-this... this isn't something of this world! I won't acknowledge something like you exists! If I do then I... I will... aa... God, please——"

——And the voice has fell completely silent.

The silence continued, the last of the screams have completely vanished,

.........**step**.........

Once again, something has began to move. Takeru exhaled deeply and poised his sword.

That's not good. This one's dangerous. Takeru's intuition has sounded alarm bells in her head.

step* *step*, *step* *step, something was approaching.

Takeru's tension reached its peak, and the moment he made a stance for stabbing.

It showed up, the threat's shadow.

From the darkness, slowly, on limp legs, it appeared in front of him and he saw it.

"............Onii...chan?"

He was at loss for words.

The threat he has been feeling.

The opponent he was about to fight, was his beloved little sister.

"...Kiseki...?"

Unable to handle this situation, Takeru stood there while holding his sword with a dumbfounded expression.

Why was Kiseki in this place. Why was he meeting face-to-face with her in a place like this.

And why was he... directing his sword at her.

It was as... just like...

Just like five years ago——

"I'm glad... I chased... after the sound of my heart... but was able to properly... meet..."

Kiseki laughed without any strength and took a step with her limp legs.

Takeru stepped back on reflex.

After seeing her brother's reaction, she powerlessly reached out to him and laughed sadly.

"I'm sorry... Onii-chan..."

"Ngh...!

"Kiseki... did it... again."

She shed a red tear from one of her eyes, and her body staggered.

Takeru shoot out and ran up to her.

"Kiseki...!! Kiseki!"

He caught his little sister's body and called out to her.

Kiseki was stark naked and she wasn't wearing the Gleipnir she always had attached to her head.

She looked completely released from under control.

In Takeru's arms, Kiseki made a genuinely relaxed smile.

"You...why...!"

"Wanted...to meet...you."

"............!"

"............always...wanted............to be like...this..."

Happy, Kiseki placed her hand on Takeru's cheek and like that, she lost consciousness.

The back alley was empty.

No bodies. Not a single piece of meat. Not even a single hair.

Only the torn apart silk hat was lying on the ground.

It was obvious what happened. the Dealer and his subordinate, as well as the sorcerer in the Silk Hat – "The Magician of Hamelin"... everyone was erased by Kiseki.

He clenched his teeth in chagrin and wrapped Kiseki's body with his jacket.

"——Kusanagi."

Suddenly hearing a voice, Takeru looked up with eyes wide open.

"...that girl...who is she...?"

Ouka showed a stunned expression.

From the alley's corner she poised the gun to the side and asked.

——*What to do.*

He wondered how did Ouka see this situation.

Kiseki's specified danger level is SS, moreover she has escaped from the prison. It wouldn't be unreasonable for her to shot her dead on spot.

But honestly, that wasn't a problem. Although it was a fact that he didn't want his little sister killed, but the fact was that a mere gun was unable to kill Kiseki.

On the contrary.

His comrade trying to kill Kiseki would spell out danger for the comrade herself. Unknowingly, Takeru has picked up the sword.

Unknowingly to himself, Takeru has——poised his sword in Ouka's direction.

"...Kusanagi..."

Ouka put on a confused expression.

"Takeru? Are you safe? Is everything all right? What happened to the magician?"

"Shh, don't make so much noise. What if there still are enemies here?"

"Ootori, what are you doing. Kusanagi is there right? Hurry up and proceed."

Behind Ouka, all the platoon members were waiting.

Everyone was worried about him.

Because he knew that, the tip of Takeru's sword was shaking and rattling noisily.

The reason Takeru held his sword, was not only because he didn't want his little sister to be killed.

It was to protect his comrades from being hurt by Kiseki.

Don't come. Please don't come any closer. You can't come.

Takeru's face was distorted by fear. Ouka was completely unable to understand in what kind of situation Takeru was in.

However,

"............you guys."

Quietly, he carefully spoke.

"Wait there. Absolutely do not come over here."

Ouka said so to her comrades and has put her gun in the holster. And while standing in the middle of the pathway, she spoke to her comrades again.

"Listen. Absolutely do not move. Stay where you are."

"W-what is it? What's going on?"

"You want to take all the credit for interception for yourself?! Or are you trying to steal Kusanagi?!"

"............"

"I beg you. Please."

She spoke with a calm, compelling voice. Understanding only the seriousness of the situation, her comrades fell silent.

Ouka didn't pay attention to her comrades and while staring straight at Takeru, she began to walk up to him slowly.

While strongly embracing Kiseki with one arm, Takeru continued to aim his sword at Ouka, supporting himself with his knee.

From the look in his eyes, it was obvious that it wasn't the usual Takeru.

The sword's tip was unlike like that of a swordsman, and was trembling helplessly.

"Don't come... you can't...come..."

With a freezing cold voice, Takeru tried to stop Ouka.

However, Ouka hadn't stopped. She approached him slowly and stopped right in front of him.

As the tense situation continued, while being careful as not to stimulate Takeru, Ouka gently grasped the sword with her hand.

If he were to lose himself even momentarily, he would cut off Ouka's finger.

Ouka knelt down, and put the blade she has grasped right next to her neck.

"...I don't understand what kind of situation is this in the least."

"...!!"

"And what is that girl... I don't know either."

Ouka spoke as if trying to calm him down.

"But I am... confident about two things."

"..........."

"First, that you are suffering now."

Takeru's shoulder twitched strongly.

"And the second."

She put strength into the hand that was grasping the blade.

Ouka's blood has flowed down the blade and reached Takeru's hands.

"That I am not your enemy."

Gently, she smiled. Takeru's trembling faintly stopped.

"You have saved me before. This time, I want to save you."

"............!"

Her voice was gentle and strong, finally, Takeru took his hand off the sword.

With a high-pitched sound the sword fell down to the ground.

After confirming that he released the sword, Ouka placed a hand and rubbed his shoulders.

"What... did I do..."

"It's okay. Don't mind it. Rather than that, this girl is...?"

Ouka glanced at Kiseki's face.

Takeru chewed his lower lip and resolved himself.

"...she is... my little sister. Her name is Kiseki... Kusanagi Kiseki."

"............"

"She has SS-class danger designation... surely... she must have escaped from the deepest prison..."

"............"

"...in order to... meet me..."

His words wouldn't settle down and he said them as if spitting them out.

Takeru was afraid, he was afraid of what kind of reaction will Ouka show.

Surely, Ouka would act as an Inquisitor and wouldn't be able to ignore the danger designation. Takeru too, were he to be calm, would made the same judgment.

He understood that was the best course of action.

"...I see. Just as you said Kusanagi, she's a cute girl."

"...............eh?"

"But you don't resemble each other. Is there that much difference between siblings of different sex?"

Hearing these unexpected words, Takeru looked up.

As he looked, he saw Ouka playing with the hair on Kiseki's cheek, she stroked it and smiled.

With a wry smile, she looked at Takeru.

"I told you I won't do anything bad right? Leave it to me."

Ouka stood up and turned her back to Takeru.

"Take this girl and come with me."

"...what do you intend?"

"Believe in me."

As he was told to, Takeru held Kiseki and followed Ouka.

Ouka went right at a T shaped alley intersection of the alley and joined the platoon members. Takeru too, has followed her.

"Come on what's this! What were you sneakily doing all this while——and hey, who's that girl!"

"N-naked woman?! Why naked?!"

"............"

All three showed a different reaction, and everyone's line of sight was concentrated on Kiseki.

Takeru tried to make some kind of facial expression, but all he could muster was a weak, wry smile.

"...my...little sister."

Just by conveying the truth to her being his little sister, everyone fell silent.

Usagi and Mari reacted with 'Eeeeeh?!' in surprise but seeing Takeru's reaction, they didn't voice it.

Ikaruga just stared at Takeru anxiously and without saying anything.

Ouka looked at everyone one by one and closed her eyes.

"First, follow what I am to tell you now. Nikaido Mari, there is something I want you to do."

"...fuee?"

"Is the barrier in this alley still up?"

After being questioned, Mari returned to herself and replied in a hurry.

"Eh, ah... yeah. It's probably made with use of a Magical Heritage. Because there's almost no magic leaking out, the Inquisition probably won't find it... it's crafted skilfully."

"Then go and explore to find the Dealer's hideout. It should be in this area."

"W-why? Wasn't it all solved? Also, I'm not in the mood for that."

"It's fine, please. We will take this girl and hide there for a while."

Including Takeru, all members were stunned.

Ouka put a hand on her hip and made a difficult expression.

"Explanations later. Move! Our job isn't over yet!"

Like an instructor, Ouka has pushed the back of all members other than Takeru. They followed Mari who was chasing after magic's reaction and started walking.

Takeru embraced his unstable emotions of gratitude and walked beside Ouka.

Ouka looked down at Kiseki who was nestled to Takeru beside her and murmured.

"Kusanagi, is that girl dangerous?"

"............yeah. Probably, she is more dangerous than you think she is."

"...the possibility for our comrades to be harmed?"

After being questioned with a serious look, Takeru closed his eyes strongly and gave a clear answer.

"It's all right. As long as I'm beside her, she definitely won't do such a thing, I won't let her. And if by any chance something happens, I'll show you that I can stop her."

After being told that, Ouka placed a hand on Takeru's shoulder.

"If you're saying something, then it's not 'stop her' but 'protect her'. An older brother should protect his little sister."

Not saying anything else other than that, Ouka started walking ahead of him.

Takeru once again turned towards Kiseki and stared at her sleeping expression.

It was the first time Takeru could stare at his little sister's sleeping face like that. The pain and the joy have come equally, and he,

"...thank you."

In a small voice, said his thanks to Ouka.

The Glossary

Mandragora (マンドラゴラ) - It's written as (発狂塊根) meaning "Mad Root" .

Chapter 3 - A Moment of Peace

In a rural mountain region. On the peaceful mountain covered with snow, there was a single hut.

It was the second Valhalla scout squad's standby station.

That's what the people living in this hut were calling it.

"——So, the Inquisition headquarters is on the verge of collapse?"

The blue-haired girl who was playing around with a radio opened her eyes wide, and said spoke with astonishment in her voice.

《"No, it's not like that. The VIP we're supposed to rescue is isolated in the underground facility, and only a part of the deepest prison was destroyed."》

"...I see."

《"However, according to the information there is no longer any facility that can accommodate the VIP in the headquarters. Since it will take a considerable amount of time to repair it, seems like she'll be transported to another facility."》

The girl's fingertips were loudly hitting the table.

"Then we'll pursue them. It's an opportunity to crush that academy."

《"............are you... an idiot?"》

"I'm not. Mother Goose is the one who's an idiot. Crushing that school and taking revenge for mama is my goal."

《"It's enough that Haunted is acting according to his personal feelings. We are not seeking a war with them."》

"But, that's only you Mother Goose, and Orochi. Valhalla is seeking war with them. Witches despise humans."

《"...I won't deny that, but it's not like they want to kill everyone. There are many witches who seek a world without conflict."》

The girl has gathered her fingers forming a fist.

"...a world without conflict? What's interesting in such a thing. The world Mother Goose and Orochi desire is just your ego. It's different from what everyone wants."

《"......you're thinking just like Haunted does. I've had it, Orochi, please take over."》

"No, I still haven't finished talking. Right now is the chance to atta——"

After the girl said that much, a hand stretched from behind her.

Behind the girl stood a slim man in a kimono. His age would indicate early twenties or so, he had disorderly long hair and his pale skin was strangely fitting the kimono he wore, he seemed like a ghost. Moreover, his eyes were closed shut, the fact that both of his eyes were like that meant...

He was blind. Light had already left his eyes.

Despite not seeing he took the microphone from the girl, and while eating some dried meat he took over the call.

The girl puffed up her cheeks.

"Orochi, don't butt in."

"Yes yes shaddup, shaddup. Piss off, *Diluted*."

Diluted. It referred to how she was drinking very weak tea and coffee.

That's a nickname the man in kimono, Orochi has given the girl.

"Don't call me 'diluted'. I'll cut you up."

"Oh-hoo, well said towards your master. Try it if you think you can."

"...........grrr."

"Here, I'll give you a candy so stay silent."

Orochi has thrown a candy to the girl and dismissed her after coming up to the radio.

"——Hey, Orochi here. Sorry 'bout my disciple."

《"...you should educate her more firmly. Although she is a valuable fighting force, there's a problem with her behavior."》

"Dahaha! Even if you say that to my great self, she's been like this ever since she was entrusted to me."

After laughing merrily, Orochi erased the smile from his face.

"...I more or less predicted that this would happen. The VIP... Kusanagi Kiseki has broke out of jail right? That girl has reached puberty. I could tell that this would happen sooner or later."

《"Yes. Haunted's and Mephisto's assaults have ended in a failure, although I determined it to be convenient, however..."》

"Hmph, that's how it'll turn out if you leave it to that pervert you know? 150 years ago it, was his fault that we were trapped in a world like this. You, who has fought along with my great self should know that."

《"Those were instructions from above, it couldn't be helped. There're lots of people who want to fight on our side, so there's a lot of madmen like him who want to start a war."》

"............so? What do we do, General."

《"Assault the convoy during the transportation and retrieve the VIP."》

Hearing Mother Goose's plan, Orochi snorted.

"And here I was sure ya would give the order to kill her."

《"Even if I gave such an order I know that you wouldn't carry it out, I too have no desire for that to happen. Above all, as long as we accomplish what we aim for we'll be able to save her, it'll be inevitable."》

Oh well, responded Orochi.

Beside him, the girl with blue hair was loudly ticking the candy against her teeth.

"...me and Diluted, we're doing it just us two? Reinforcements?"

《"The enemy will probably prepare dummies during transportation. We assume they might transport her through air."》

"Then two of us won't cut it."

《"We have prepared several 『Eienherjars』. They will arrive there shortly before the operation starts."》

Hearing 'Heroes' Orochi started to dig in his ear grumpily.

"...the Magical Dragoon guys huh. My great self will not acknowledge such things as 'heroes'"

《"Their bodies are that of a doll, but the soul is a real thing. Even so, there's no ego in them."》

"If the vessel for the soul is different, it's natural that the ego won't surface. Those idiots from Alchemist... they made something bizarre, their great ancestors would scold them for that."

《"In any case, they will become a part of fighting force. I do not know which ones are the dummies, for that you should use your abilities and attack all of them on case-by-case basis."》

"Heyhey. You know that we're several months away on a remote mountain. We're glad to descend to human habitats."

《"The operation will start in a few days, I will contact you again. Please finish your preparations by then."》

At the same time as Mother Goose turned off the radio, Orochi threw the headset on the table.

"Hey, Diluted, good for you. It's your first time going into actual combat. How's your self-confidence?"

Orochi placed his hands on his head and called the girl.

The girl who was beginning to improve a gun on the desk by the window made a stern expression despite having a candy bar in her mouth and glared at Orochi. Inside of two micro-machine guns there were strangely long magazines inserted, she turned the muzzles to Orochi.

"Perfect. I'm ready any time to crush the Inquisition."

She started to strongly chew on the candy she had in her mouth.

* * *

After exploring the labyrinth in the back-alley's barrier Takeru and the others have discovered the Dealer's hideout and warily invaded the interior.

The personnel inside must have escaped earlier, luckily the hideout was empty.

The interior seemed like a remodeled bar, there was a glass table and a spacious sofa, on the counter's shelves, in a row were arranged bottles with liquor. All of it was illegally produced liquor from herbs that were a natural Magical Heritage. With just this much, they could have earned a considerable amount of points.

However, it wasn't time to worry about points.

"...Kiseki."

After laying her in the bedroom in the back, Takeru stroked her cheek with the back of his hand.

Kiseki who was sleeping moved her mouth as she felt a tickle.

Just by seeing her sleep like this, Takeru was happy enough to shed tears.

It's been five years since he touched her. Takeru too hoped endlessly for this moment to come. He ascertained just how valuable was an opportunity to contact his family like this.

But while he felt happy, an anxiety echoed in his chest.

It has been five years since the tragedy during which Kiseki massacred so many people has occurred.

Recalling what happened back then, Takeru squeezed his fist.

...it's okay. It definitely won't turn out like it had back then.

Takeru calmed himself by saying that.

That's when,

"...Onii...chan?"

Faintly opening her eyelids, Kiseki woke up.

There was tension, but only for a moment. Takeru immediately made a gentle expression and moved closer to Kiseki.

"You woke up huh. How do you feel? Is there any place that hurts?"

"...? Why is Onii-chan... why is Kiseki...?"

The memory on how she came to this place must have been vague, she raised her upper body and placed a hand on her forehead.

However, she definitely hasn't lost the memory.

And it seemed like she was able to recall it in detail.

Both the memory of the slaughter from before and the massacre from five years ago.

"...Kiseki has... again..."

"It's all right. I'm here."

"But I... killed again...?!"

"You are not at fault. I know that very well."

Takeru hugged Kiseki's shoulder and pulled her to himself.

Even so, Kiseki couldn't stop being frightened by what she has done.

'...you don't know it... there's no way Kiseki isn't at fault...! Kiseki's body fulfilled her wish...!"

"...what's at fault, is your body. Not your heart."

With her face buried in his chest, Takeru stroked Kiseki's head.

The two hugged each other.

"———Kusanagi, we need to talk a litt... hey whaaa!"

Ouka who suddenly opened the doors and came in saw the two hugging, she raised a hysterical voice.

"Y-you... w-what are you siblings...!"

Despite being someone who could be described as serious-type, Ouka has blurted out something strangely comical.

Startled by that overly-serious tone of voice, Takeru released Kiseki's shoulders.

"............you've been considerably influenced by Suginami haven't you."

"——?!!"

"Don't act *that* shocked."

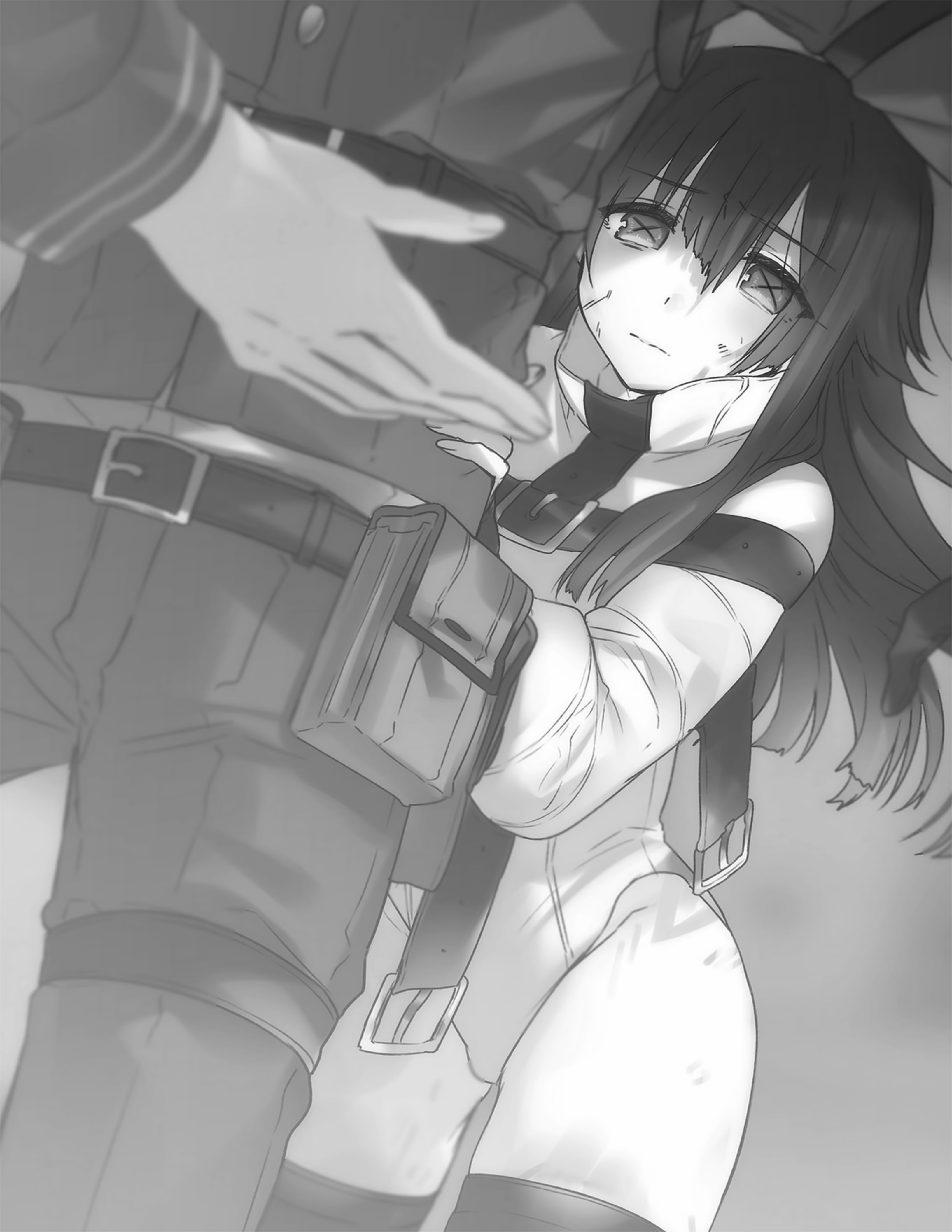
As he smiled wryly, Kiseki who was absent-mindedly staring at Ouka from the bed quickly hid behind Takeru.

Only peeking with half of her face from behind his back, Kiseki stared at Ouka anxiously.

Ouka stood in front of the two with a gentle expression and after bending her waist, she looked at Kiseki.

"Nice to meet you. I'm Ootori Ouka... I'm one of AntiMagic Academy's 35th Test Platoon's member, Kusanagi's comrade. Best regards."

She stretched her hand out.



Kiseki alternated between looking at Ouka's face and her hand, then she cried out a short "ahh". After looking at her hair she realized it was the girl with sunset-colored hair about whom she heard before.

She hesitantly overlapped her trembling hand with Ouka's.

"Kiseki is... called Kiseki. Onii-chan's... little sister."

"Yeah, I've heard. Just as Kusanagi said, you're a cute girl."

As Ouka smiled, Kiseki responded with a blush.

"Don't worry. Nothing bad will happen to you, I promise."

"............"

"You're my benefactor's little sister. I will never abandon you."

Met with Ouka's sincere attitude, Kiseki looked down showing a troubled reaction. Somewhere in that expression of hers there was a shadow.

"Sorry... as you can see she's bad with strangers. She can't have a decent conversation with anyone other than me."

Takeru said hinting that its complex, and Ouka shook her head.

"No, there's no problem... rather than that Kusanagi, come with me for a moment. Everyone wants to talk about what to do now."

He nodded, agreeing to her offer.

Ouka waved to Kiseki and left the bedroom.

Takeru tried to follow her, but.

"...Onii-chan."

He was stopped by Kiseki, and turned around.

She was facing down and gripped the bed sheets strongly.

"I'll be back soon, wait a moment."

Although he said so to reassure her, Kiseki still faced down anxiously.

"...don't worry. I don't know if I'll get everyone to help me but... I will definitely do something about you."

He had no confidence. He had no way of confirming it. Even so, that was the only thing he could say.

Suppressing the hatred he felt for himself, he opened the door and headed back to his comrades.

The moment he was closing the door, Kiseki's lips moved slightly. Takeru saw that.

"...ll me..."

Even though the voice didn't reach him, just from the movement of her lips he knew what was she saying.

Despite that, as if making it so that he didn't hear it, Takeru closed the door.

After Takeru left the bedroom, he found the members sitting down.

Ouka was standing while entrusting her back to the wall. Everyone was silent, staring anxiously at Takeru.

"Sorry... I made you wait."

He uttered an apology and sat down on a counter seat. Ouka glanced at him.

"Kusanagi, about what we do from now on..."

"Wait a moment. First there's something I need to tell everyone about it."

"...is that fine?"

"I can't involve them without them knowing anything. Also, I was going to reveal this today anyway."

Hearing Takeru's resolve, Ouka closed her eyes in silence.

After placing his hand on his knees finding determination, he started to relay the truth to everyone.

"That girl is my little sister, Kusanagi Kiseki. Her danger designation is SS-class and was originally confined in the forbidden area's deepest prison."

Usagi and Mari showed an expression of surprise.

Ouka who heard about it in advance showed no reaction, Ikaruga too, has only narrowed her eyes in silence.

"Probably, she left it on her own."

"Left you say... from the forbidden area's deepest prison?!"

Displaying surprise even further, Mari leaned forward.

That was understandable. Speaking of the country's deepest prison, it was the most stringent facility of Inquisition. In terms of robustness, it was comparable to the elf restoration facility in Alchemist's fifth institute.

In response to Mari's reaction, Takeru faced down.

"That's how dangerous she is. In the past... in our home town, she killed a lot of people."

"............"

"But don't misunderstand. Kiseki is unable to control her power. She didn't do it because she wanted to. Aside from the times she goes out of control and when she's harmed... she's very docile."

"............that's..."

"She——"

It was when Takeru was about to say the truth.

Ikaruga who was staying silent up until this moment opened her mouth.

"Has Overflow Complex."

Everyone's gaze gathered on Ikaruga.

"You see, Kusanagi's little sister has a sickness like that. It's a symptom some irregular witches without a lineage have. Their Phantom Instruments are cracked when they're born, or when its membrane is vulnerable, they can release magic even without intending to do so. You must have heard about it before, right?"

Both Mari and Usagi heard the disease's name.

"This disease can be suppressed by Gleipnir if it's an ordinary witch, but the amount of magic power Kusanagi's little sister has is out of ordinary. A high amount of magic power, if not converted won't cause harm to humans, but if it causes an abnormal phenomenon, she turns into a walking disaster."

"T-then... while we're speaking, isn't it dangerous?"

"No need to worry. The thing with Overflow Complex is that it's being released when the amount of magical power is at its peak. Since she must have used a large amount of it by the time she came here, it should take a while until it's refilled. Fortunately, Kusanagi's little sister symptoms are not a crack-type, it will overflow only when it's full, until then it's okay."

Usagi stroked her chest relieved, and examined Takeru's pale complexion.

Hearing Ikaruga's description, Takeru tried to raise an objection.

"Hey, Sugi——"

"Be quiet Kusanagi. It'll be faster if I'm the one explaining."

"No, it's not about that. What you're saying is..."

"Silence."

Strictly, Ikaruga stopped him from speaking.

He was forced silent by Ikaruga's serious expression. She must have known all-too-well what he wanted to say. This is what Takeru wanted to tell her.

'What are you saying it's practically all lies.'

As Takeru's gaze questioned her as to why is she lying, Ikaruga also answered with her gaze.

There is no need to say the truth, is what it said.

"So, why does Suginami know such a thing?"

Usagi asked, and Ikaruga responded to her.

"About the time I entered the school, I hacked the forbidden area's database out of curiosity. The record about Kusanagi's sister was there."

That too, was a lie.

There were no records on Kiseki in Inquisition's database. The facility and all its instruments were stand-alone and all records were stored on paper.

Obtaining information on Kiseki through hacking was impossible. Ikaruga learned about Kiseki from Takeru after his defeat to Ouka in the middle school when he was swallowed by despair.

The reason Ikaruga kept the truth about Kiseki in secret, was definitely as not to instill fear of Kiseki in their comrades.

Takeru understood that, and hit his lap with his fist.

Telling them the truth at the moment was not a good idea.

It wasn't that he didn't trust his comrades. But it was inevitable that they would fear Kiseki.

Knowing Kiseki's identity and knowing the risk, only few could remain sane.

"............"

Ouka was aware that Ikaruga and Takeru were feeling uncomfortable.

It was clear that the two were hiding something.

She could draw out what it was by questioning them.

However, she was unable to act so rudely towards her comrades, nor she had intention to.

...not being included feels lonely.

Smiling wryly at the fact that she felt lonely, Ouka downcast her eyes.

Honestly, she has never thought that Takeru's circumstances were this serious. With his little sister designated as an SS-class risk, there is no way he wouldn't be upset. After encountering her in the back alley, he didn't know what to do.

When she shook hands with Kiseki, it wasn't that she didn't feel scared.

It was because of Ouka's own policy and the feelings she had for Takeru.

The gratitude Ouka felt toward Takeru was real. Thanks to meeting him, she didn't stray from the path of a proper person.

The bitterness of living only for revenge and loneliness.

It was a sense of isolation which resembled walking alone through darkness.

Previously, Ouka cherished it and was resolved to accept it as the obvious retribution. As if clothing herself with sin, she continued to seek revenge.

But Takeru on top of accepting her revenge, had denied her way of living.

Ouka knew, just how little a single person can do.

Ouka knew, just how meaningless is it to isolate herself.

Ouka knew, just how great the power born from cooperating with one's comrades was

That was why this time, Ouka reached out to Takeru.

Don't shoulder it alone. What are you doing agonizing yourself alone, fool. You who have forcefully shouldered half of my burden, why do you seem like you're about to be crushed by your own burden... and so she thought.

...I will shoulder your burden in my own way.

After separating from the wall, Ouka sat down on the chair next to Takeru.

As she stared at everyone's faces, she could tell that everyone felt lost not knowing what to do.

Normally, having Kiseki go back to the forbidden area, secured and subjected to appropriate treatment would be most appropriate course of action.

However, the person in question was Takeru's little sister. Although she was restrained by a powerful force, it was no wonder one would think about releasing her. However, that kind of half-assed thinking should be unacceptable for an Inquisitor candidate.

Because Mari was in a similar position, she could understand Kiseki's feelings the best. Understanding this, Ouka tried a suggestion.

"Everyone, I think you understand the situation. Without a doubt this is an emergency. Even I cannot let her, who is designated as an SS-class danger go unchecked."

"...b-but she's Takeru's little sister? Even I know what's the right thing to do but..."

Mari said so in a lukewarm manner.

Ouka nodded and placed her hands on her chest.

"Yeah. But I... as a member of Inquisition, I'm unable to release her."

Showing a strong will, Ouka stared at Takeru.

Takeru opened his hand that was clenched into a fist and turned around to her.

"............I know. I too intended to do that. Having her go outside like that is dangerous... and she too, wouldn't want that either."

"...I guess so."

"Passing her to Inquisition Board would be optimal."

Once again, Takeru clenched his fist.

Ouka put on a faint, bitter smile and looked down at the wristwatch-type device.

"After deciding that, let's act immediately. We should start moving."

"............"

"We will escort Kusanagi Kiseki to forbidden area."

Everyone looked up in surprise.

Takeru slightly rose up from the chair.

"Escort you say... aren't we going to contact Inquisition and call in Dullahans?"

"Although I really want to do that... actually my device and mobile phone started acting up after entering this barrier."

"...eh?"

"It won't respond anyhow."

Speaking of which, after entering the barrier Takeru's intercom also broke down.

However, there was an option of contacting them after leaving the barrier.

Takeru was confused, but after looking at Ouka's expression, he guessed everything.

Ouka unnaturally shook her head saying "good grief".

"Like this we can't contact them. There's no choice but to drop her off ourselves."

While saying so, Ouka showed Takeru a smile.

"Even I know that visitation of a witch with high-level danger designation is an enormous expanse. If it's an SS-class then that must be an explosive amount."

"...it can't be, that you..."

Takeru stood up from his chair.

Ouka scratched her cheek and averted her eyes.

"I am aware that this is an illegal act. It can't be said that there's no danger... but I believe Kusanagi's promise."

The promise.

As long as he's by her side, he won't let any of his comrades be harmed. Ouka believed him when he said that.

"...that's why, well... it's fine for the siblings to spend an hour alone together."

Takeru wasn't the only one surprised.

All platoon members had their mouths opened hearing an unlikely suggestion come from her mouth.

Probably feeling awkward, Ouka desperately turned away and tried to hide her face with her bangs.

The first one to laugh was Ikaruga.

"...on top of being bold, you said something that doesn't fit you."

"I-I am aware of that..."

"Were it to be Ootori from before, she would ignore the fact they're relatives or whatever and hurry to the call the Dullahans out of long-winded obligations."

"Even now I think it's a very dangerous idea."

"But well... you've done well despite how you are. You read the atmosphere well."

After being praised, Ouka's line of sight continued to wander around as she was uncomfortable.

Following Ikaruga, Usagi stared at Ouka puzzled.

"If it wasn't Kusanagi's little sister, she wouldn't show any mercy... but it's not like I won't praise that proposal."

"〜〜!! Who does Saionji think she is."

"How about obediently being glad after hearing a praise〜?"

Hearing Usagi laugh with "Ohohoho", Ouka couldn't respond anyhow.

Looking at Ouka acting so, was Mari stared at her in silence from the couch.

Her line of sight said she wasn't convinced, it relayed that she absolutely won't acknowledge it. Noticing that, Ouka glared at Mari.

"…………"

"…………"

"……………………it doesn't suit you to the point of being disgusting."

Ouka stood up and came over to Mari in silence, and then with all her strength she pinched her cheeks. Not wanting to lose, Mari pinched her cheeks too.

"Yo shou hare houman ho shan wead he wood〜! (You too are someone who can't read the mood)"

"'hont het wool o hosel hust 'hos owotten hetter 't shoshialing〜! (Don't get full of yourself just because you've gotten better at socializing)."

While the two engaged in pointless grasping one another Ikaruga approached Takeru and spoke directly into his ear.

"...accept this gift in silence. It was better not to say the truth."

"But... I can't have you all take extra responsibility for——"

"Extra? Are you serious? If you are, then I'll beat you up."

Takeru was sharply glared at and silenced.

He didn't experience her glare that much before.

"I don't care if Kusanagi thinks that this is superfluous, but this is a one-in-a-lifetime thing. This is the only time that girl will be free as she is now."

"But, Kiseki is..."

"I know. If she knew about that girl's real identity, Ootori would abort the arrangement. If it's possible to use this case, make sure you use it in full even if it's at expanse of your comrades."

"..........."

"...make good use of the time you two can spend together. Whether you do it or not, or will you stay indecisive as you are now, is up to you."

"Suginami... I..."

"I think that is the proper thing to do. There is no 'correct' answer to choose. It's something that can't be easily decided on... so it's all right to trouble yourself over it. But make sure to properly decide yourself. Because I, have no intention of shouldering your burden."

Ikaruga stated it firmly and looked at Ouka who sat down on the chair next to them.

Her eyes were cold, but also gentle.

Takeru looked around at the platoon that was as noisy as usual, and dropped his line of sight at the palm of his own hand.

Ten minutes later, the 35th platoon's members have finished a brief self-introduction and after leaving Takeru aside they have surrounded Kiseki.

"——Noww, since that's how it is, the platoon's fashion leader Nikaido Mari-san will coordinate Kiseki-chan's outfit!"

Kiseki suddenly grew impatient and has turned restless.

"U-um... what does... this mean?"

"Since you siblings can finally have a date all by yourselves with no outsiders butting in, it's decided that it has to be perfect!"

"...date?"

"Worry do not Kiseki-chann. S-sis will make you all cute and prettyy."

Kiseki slightly drew back seeing Mari come closer to her while panting heavily, and entangled fingers of her both hands looking troubled.

"...but... Kiseki isn't in a position to be able to do such a thing... for everyone too, it would be best to hurry and send me back to forbidden area... that's..."

"Come on〜it's fine! I too am a witch just like Kiseki-chan, I won't be intimidated by you."

"...witch?"

"Indeed. Look, this collar. The folks in here don't mind I'm a witch at all, with exception of a single person."

Seeing everyone's gaze focus on her, Kiseki was flustered.

"............but even so, it's not good. I'll be a bother."

"You're similar to Takeru only in weird attitude like that! You three, don't just stand there and help out!"

Mari pointed at the platoon members and started to act bossy.

"Do not try to pointlessly raise our tension, it is annoying... who put Nikaido in charge, I wonder."

"Why, ain't that obvious? Among all of us, ain't I the one most knowledgeable about fashion?"

Taking a twirl around and putting on a smile that made it seem like ☆ signs appeared beside, Mari finished it with a peace sign.

Everyone's line of sight showed no reaction.

"...what?!"

"For some reason it seems to me like she'll end up in some indecent outfit. In that case, it is my turn. I shall pick clothes befitting an elegant young maiden!"

"Ohohoho" Usagi laughed loudly.

Hearing that, Ouka cleared her throat.

"Although it might seem that I have no sense because of what I'll say... you two, make sure it's as inconspicuous as possible."

"How stiff, it's all right for just a bit. Also, on the other hand, it's unnatural for adolescent girls not to dress up a little."

Mari pouted.

"That might be so, but we don't have much clothing on hand. We must select something from the ones we had prepared for disguise beforehand. Our choice is limited."

Ouka raised her index finger and urged everyone to calm down.

Usagi and Mari looked at Ouka a bit dissatisfied, and then moved their line of sight towards Ikaruga who was sitting on the bed, or to be precise, they stared at the pointlessly big boston bag next to her.

Ikaruga guessed what they meant and she opened the bag, taking out the clothes from inside. One after another with a rustle she took out one outfit after another. It was an amount which seemed to be too big to fit in the bag.

"——Don't make a mess okay?"

"Why did you get this many?!"

Taken aback, Ouka questioned her with a bitter face.

"But wasn't it you Ootori, who have told me to prepare disguises? I did my best making these?"

"I didn't tell you to this far!"

The amount and diversity of the clothes could make one dizzy.

For a while after that, Kiseki acted like a dress-up doll.

This isn't good, that isn't good... and like that she was putting on and taking off clothes.

The first one, was a one-piece dress and a straw hat.

"...umm... w-why is it..."

"Oh my, how cute."

"It feels like summer."

"...it does fit her, but doesn't it feel out of season?"

"Hmm... she might catch a cold."

The second one, a yukata and a fan.

"...I'm sorry but... it feels cold..."

"Black hair fits yukata's after all, doesn't it."

"It feels like summer."

"Oh, Kiseki-chan... your breasts are unexpectedly..."

"Rejected. It's too out-of-season and eye-catching."

The third one, AntiMagic Academy high school's female school uniform and a desert eagle.

"...ah, this is... somewhat, easy to move in... I think."

"Nice～dual-wielding large guns gives off a hard-working feeling, really nice～."

"Can't see a tree in the forest, is it all right?"

"So that's how it is... she has slightly bigger breasts than I do...!"

"In the uniform, if she's asked for an ID she'll be found out immediately, rejected."

The fourth one, bikini.

"It's... embarrassing."

"*Excellent*."

"Again, it's turned back to summer hasn't it."

"Suginami! You're definitely making allusions to my chest aren't you?!"

"Are you an idiot——!!"

Ikaruga's proposals, which for some reason weirdly focused on summer clothes were rejected. In the end, they settled with the one Mari had picked.

A loose sweatshirt and jeans pants, also, a cap.

"I tried not to make it too plain nor flashy, and the cap will hide her face right?"

How about it? Mari puffed her chest proudly.

Although they weren't convinced by Mari's confidence, they agreed that it didn't seem any weird.

"Is it... not strange? It's the first time I've wore proper clothes..."

Kiseki moved her body, fidgeting, bothered about her appearance.

"It's okay it's okay. You're cute, Kiseki-chan."

Mari pat her head with a smile on her face.

"...thank you...very much."

Even as she faced down, Kiseki's cheeks were slightly dyed with happiness.

That gesture seemed to deliver a clean hit to Mari's heart.

"Kiseki-chan——in the future, I'll show you that I'll definitely become your sister!"

Overcome with emotions, Mari hugged Kiseki.

That moment, Ouka and Usagi strongly hit her head from behind.

"What shady thing you are saying while taking advantage of the moment?!"

"Drop your sexual harassment you perverted muffler...!"

"It's not a reason to hit me right?!"

Once again, the three started shrieking at each other.

Not knowing how to respond to that, Kiseki was completely nervous. That's when Ikaruga moved behind her back.

"Let's ignore those dumb girls and put a make-up on you."

"M-make-up...? I-I never... did it... what do I... do?"

"Don't worry. Come over here, I'll do it for you."

While saying so, Ikaruga sat Kiseki in front of a dressing table.

After removing a set of tools from the bag, they faced each other and Ikaruga started to put make-up on Kiseki.

Probably because she wasn't used to it, Kiseki's shoulder was trembling strongly with tension.

"Don't move."

"Ah, I-I'm very sorr..."

"Relax your shoulders. It's best to be natural when the make-up is applied."

As she was told, Kiseki released the strength in her shoulders and erased the expressions.

"Good girl... that's good."

It was a very small one, but Ikaruga made a smile with her soft lips.

As she was putting on foundation, Ikaruga spoke quietly.

"...about your big brother..."

"...?"

"No matter what choice he makes... please forgive him."

"............"

"I know everything. About him, about you."

"............"

Kiseki tried to open her mouth in surprise, but "don't move" she was lightly stopped by Ikaruga.

"Probably, he won't make the choice he wants to make."

"............"

"You might think that's terrible... but you aren't the one to make that choice. It's him. The one who has it hardest is definitely... not the one who's influenced by choice, but the one choosing."

"........................"

"That's why... you shouldn't hold a grudge."

"...................................."

"It's wrong to blame it on someone else. ...okay?"

In Ikaruga's silent pupils, there was some sadness as she looked at Kiseki.

Kiseki fell silent.

After getting rid of any expressions, she stared straight at Ikaruga.

And until the end, Kiseki hadn't nodded to Ikaruga's words even once.

Around twelve o'clock, the streets were bustling during lunchtime.

Because it was a holiday, it was filled to the brim with couples and families.

On the terrace in the town, there was a pair of siblings.

In the end, Takeru accepted the escort proposal of Ouka's to spend this fleeting moment together with Kiseki.

Ouka and the others watched over the two from a short distance away and remained vigilant.

For the two who could only meet only for five to ten minutes a month, it was incredibly precious time. Takeru was wearing a casual jacket and clothes, Kiseki was wearing a loose sweatshirt Ikaruga had brought, as well as short jeans pants Mari took with her. She had a cap on her head for disguise and seemed like a perfectly normal girl.

Not accustomed to crowds Kiseki was restlessly looking around suspicious.

"O-outside is full of people isn't it..."

"Scared?"

"No... just... a little surprised."

She was fidgeting concerned about her own clothing.

Takeru looked at her with a smile and rest his chin on his hand.

"They look good on you so don't worry."

"I-is that so... my legs feel a bit breezy."

While still embarrassed, she was happy being told it suits her and laughed lightly.

"...so outside was like this huh."

As if looking far into the distance, Kiseki looked around at the city from the café. Even seeing such ordinary scenery was a first time for her.

Wearing normal girl's clothes, normally enjoying a meal in the city, chatting normally.

All of that, was a first experience for her.

It might be boring for others, but for Kiseki it was irreplaceable time.

However, her expression hasn't cleared up.

It was as if she was still looking at it from the prison, it was dull.

"...everyone's a good person."

"The platoon members you mean?"

Takeru asked while taking a sip of coffee, Kiseki made a small nod.

"They are just as Onii-chan has described them. Despite knowing how dangerous Kiseki is, they treated me well as Onii-chan's little sister."

As if tired, Kiseki weakly laughed.

"Mari-san is wonderful isn't she."

"Yeah, though using a foul language occasionally is her flaw."

"Usagi-san seems like an onee-chan."

"She's treated like a little sister in the platoon, so she must have wanted to act like an older one now."

"Ikaruga-san, seems like a mother."

"Somehow, she's the kind of person who's good at taking care of others."

"..................Ouka-san... is beautiful isn't she."

"...yea... well, I guess."

Trying to cover it up, Takeru drank coffee fast.

In fact, Takeru was just as nervous as she was.

After all, normally he was unable to get in contact with his little sister like this. It might be abnormal, but he was unable to speak with her face-to-face like that for a long time.

Moreover, Kiseki was a girl, and she wasn't like the platoon members who all have a screw loose somewhere. Because she was a timid girl, he unwittingly turned nervous.

Because she was wearing clothes different from her usual restraint suit, she looked like a completely different person.

"Hey, Onii-chan."

"Mm? Want to eat something? You should be hungry right?"

"No, I have a favor to ask you, is that fine?"

"Sure, anything you say. It's the time everyone made with much trouble, I'll listen to whatever you say today."

As Takeru said so proudly, Kiseki made a small smile.

"I see. Then——"

With a smile still on her face, Kiseki pleaded to him.

"——Would you please kill Kiseki?"

Despite the sound being blocked by the city's noise, these words reached Takeru's ears with certainty.

It was the second time Takeru was asked to do this by Kiseki.

The first time, was during the day of massacre five years ago.

Even now he could easily recall that moment.

Her eyes, her tears.

"You see, today I was really happy, it was fun. I thought a day like that would never come in my lifetime. That's why it's already enough... Kiseki was happy."

"............"

"............you should understand right, Onii-chan."

Kiseki looked down and tightly gripped the hem of her sweatshirt.

Takeru quietly watched her.

"Kiseki has... killed lots of people. Made so many... people unhappy. Onii-chan might say it's not Kiseki's fault, but since it's about me, I can tell. Five years ago, Kiseki killed many people out of her own free will."

"............"

"Kiseki's power is growing stronger and stronger. Yesterday too, Inquisition's facility was unable to suppress it, and I have come outside like this. If left alone, Kiseki will kill many people again... probably, on a scale incomparable to five years ago."

"............"

"That's why Kiseki should die. But... not by someone else's hand, but Onii-chan's."

"............"

"It's okay if it's Onii-chan."

Tears pooled in her eyes and Kiseki looked straight at Takeru.

Takeru too, returned the stare unchanging.

"Sorry, I can't do that. Just like five years ago, I cannot kill you."

He firmly responded so.

Tears have flowed along Kiseki's cheeks.

"What kind of older brother would kill his little sister."

"…………"

"No matter whatever others say, I'm your older brother. Even if the entire world wants you dead, I want you to live."

"...Onii-chan."

"That's what it means to be family."

Takeru grasped Kiseki's hand and enveloped it with both of his.

"An older brother, is someone who protects his little sister."

He smiled sadly and stroked Kiseki's head with one hand.

Kiseki looked down again, and cried in silence. Takeru put strength into the hands that held her.

"Even if it turns out that I have to kill you no matter what... if that becomes inevitable... and the time to kill you comes——"

Takeru hit his chest with his fist and said clearly.

"——That's when I'll die as well."

He stared at her with straightforward eyes, and not a single lie could be seen in his gaze.

Kiseki's endless loneliness has eased strongly as she heard his words.

Dying together.

Such simple and cliché words were enough to overcome Kiseki's desire to be killed. It was very cruel, very selfish, and incredibly sweet, it was Kiseki's greatest hope.

"Rea...lly?"

Incredible sense of relief wrapped around her.

"Yeah, it's a promise. But not now. Until I reach my very limit, I will continue to protect you."

"...are you...really fine with...that?"

"It's been already decided. I might be unable to kill you but... I will definitely show you that I'll protect you."

That's why... as if begging her, Takeru said.

"Won't you do your best until the very end for your Onii-chan?"

Kiseki's hand he was holding in his left hand was hot.

In middle of the sorrow, she smiled.

"...really... Onii-chan's stubborn parts... don't change."

She said so while looking at him with tear-filled eyes.

"Make sure... to protect the promise, okay?"

"Yeah. After today's over, I will definitely meet you again."

"...yup."

"If I become an Inquisitor, I will be able to earn more money. And so... the amount of time we're able to meet for will increase."

"...yup."

"And then... one day, definitely."

He stopped, not finishing what he started to say.

It was an absurd dream. What he once aspired to do, "Changing the Inquisition.", that goal dwelled inside him in a different form now.

Takeru's goal which was to allow his little sister, Kiseki, live a normal life was probably impossible. A pipe dream, but deep inside, he hasn't completely abandoned that dream.

"If Onii-chan keeps his promise... Kiseki too, will try to hold out a little longer."

She laughed as if she was saved, and complied to Takeru's wish.

——What Takeru didn't know, is the fact that only the words he said about dying together reached her ears.

That was how close to reaching its limit her heart was, and Takeru had no way of knowing that.

The two left the cafeteria and went to town.

"Waa..."

Seeing a simple scenery of the city, Kiseki raised a voice of admiration.

She walked beside Takeru and her eyes were sparkling as they moved around the town following the road leading to school.

"Onii-chan, what's that? It's turning round and round."

"That's a Ferris wheel. Currently, it seems to be the world's biggest one."

"Hoee... biiig."

"...want to try riding it?"

"R-ride? Something that big? Isn't it hard to raise up?"

Timidly, Kiseki compared Takeru and the Ferris wheel.

Stiffness disappeared from her expression and she looked like a girl her age.

To be able to see an expression like that on her, he was very grateful. He has to thanks Ouka and the others later.

"Let's go and see. You'll be able to overlook the entire city."

Takeru pressed a button on the cheap mobile phone he purchased earlier, and conveyed that they were going for the Ferris wheel to Ouka in low voice.

《"It's all right, you can't see us, but we're all nearby. We're spotting Inquisitors here and there, we'll guide you using as safe a route as possible, but try not to stand out."》

"Roger... sorry about that... having you to act as an escort..."

《"No problem. I was the one to bring it up."》

After hearing her proud voice, Takeru no longer felt apologetic.

"...thanks. I'll take responsibility for it later."

《"It was my suggestion, I'll take responsibility for it."》

"Don't be stupid. I'm the captain. A captain is the one who should take res——"

《"You're acting suspiciously. We're starting already."》

She one-sidedly cut off the communication, Takeru scratched his cheek unconvinced.

Kiseki looked at her brother contacting with his comrades and gently narrowed her eyes.

Stretched his hand reaching out to Kiseki.

"Let's go, Kiseki. Today, make sure to play lots with your Onii-chan."

With a heartfelt smile, he waited for her.

She was facing down with teary eyes but...

"Yupp."

The next time she raised her head, she had a smile from ear to ear.

When she took Takeru's hand, his heart calmed down.

...yeah, that's right.

Feeling as if his heart was filled up, his eyes were moistened with tears.

I... for the sake of this warmth...

He recalled what he had entered the school for.

Ever since he met with his little sister, it was the first time they touched this gently.

...I don't want to lose this.

No matter how dark this world is, just to protect this girl... so he thought. Takeru, was Kiseki's older brother.

There was no other way, as they were a family.

——However, the world wouldn't allow this bond to remain.

In front, among people who were waiting for a signal to change.

Melding into the flow of people, was a single person stepping between them.

The person released killing intent piercing the pair of siblings no one else took notice of.

Feeling this killing intent, Takeru unconsciously took defensive posture and faced in front.

"What a joke——monster in human skin, two heretics taking a stroll side by side."

No way, he thought.

But his premonition was right on spot.

Takeru saw him. Right in the middle of the main street, in front of major department store.

Glaring at them from the gap in the crowd, was Kirigaya Kyouya.

"...Kyouya...?"

"Don't call me by my name. Being called that by you... makes me feel fucking disgusted."

Among the noise coming from the crowd, Kyouya's voice reached Takeru's ears.

Kyouya always used a provocative tone of voice, but he never directed murderous intent at him along with it.

Why was Kyouya there?

Takeru recalled the encounter with him a few days earlier, and strengthened his vigilance.

For a while already, he felt a discomfort in his spine as if it was creaking.

He had a bad feeling and attempted to contact his comrades through mobile phone.

However, what returned was just noise.

Whether it was Usagi, Mari, or Ikaruga, no one answered.

He didn't understand. It was too disturbing. This atmosphere, this murderous intent, this situation.

Takeru turned more vigilant, and stood in front as if to protect Kiseki.

"...what did you come here for. Got any business with me?"

"What...for? Are you fucking joking?"

"I'm not. I'm just spending a holiday with my little sister. If you've anything——"

The signal turned blue, and people started to stream through.

Kyouya was no longer visible for a few seconds, and when he appeared again.

Beside him——there was figure of Yoshimizu Akira.

Takeru's words stopped to flow, and he looked at Akira.

Just like back when he saw an illusion of her in the hallway, she was smiling mockingly.

"...Yoshi...mizu... why are you..."

As he was in front of a person who shouldn't exist, his thinking stopped.

The current Akira was a clone. She was much weaker than a normal human being because of rapid growth. Even if she were to wake up from her coma, she shouldn't be able to stand.

Akira was grinning as she stared at Takeru and Kiseki, she only smiled and did not answer.

No, that's wrong...! She's not Yoshimizu!

His intuition was sounding alarm bells.

In front of confused Takeru, Akira showed her very, very long tongue.

"——Let's do it Master. We're doing it."

Kyouya, while still releasing murderous intent poised a gun to one side.

"...I'll tell you what I came for, Kusanagi."

He slowly raised his right hand and made gesture as if placing a finger on the trigger. From his mouth, anger and murderous intent overflowed.

"It's obvious...! For a witch hunt!"

His wide open eyes sparkled directed towards Takeru——no, as they stared directly at Kiseki.

He was shaken, an alarm echoed in Takeru's brain, goosebumps and a chill spread throughout his body.

He immediately shouted.

"Kiseki! Run away!

Refusing, Kiseki turned towards Kyouya.

Kyouya, articulated words of power.

A declaration of witch hunt.

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"

"Kyouya...!"

"——Malleus Maleficarum!"

Activating Soumatou, he sprinted.

In the world that turned slow-motion, Takeru saw it clearly.

Yoshimizu Akira's appearance has burst and turned into dark green particles which wrapped around Kyouya's body.

——*Come! Lapis!*

Takeru shouted a summon of his own weapon in his brain.

Momentarily, Takeru's body was wrapped in azure-colored particles just like Kyouya.

And two magic beings clashed.

Metallic sounds and explosions roared in the city.

Because of the huge impact, the civilians in the surroundings have fell down as if knocked off their knees by a storm.

Following that, they ran away and scattered like baby spiders.

In an instant, confusion has dominated the main street and it turned into a vortex of screams.

At its center, an azure armored knight's sword and a dark green demon's gun barrel clashed and ceased moving.

Kyouya wore a dark green armor and tried to shoot with a huge cannon which assimilated into his right hand. Takeru poised the nodachi on the edge of the muzzle, and moved it upwards.

In the nick of time, a powerful blow was emitted into the sky.

The power released was marvelous. The impact of the magic being shot into the sky above looked like a buckshot. The sky was filled with the power reminiscent of dragon's breath, and has partially destroyed a skyscraper after grazing it.

In the middle of the raining debris, both sides drew closer to their prey.

"Why do you have a Relic Eater...!"

"Ha!! It's just as you can see, quite a plight isn't it! The little sheep that shitty Chairman has gathered aren't limited to you and Ootori, that's all!"

"...! I don't know your circumstances but listen to me! Were you instructed to catch my little sister by the Chairman?! Even without you doing it like this, I intended to return her to the forbidden area!"

Takeru said the truth as they pushed against each other, Kyouya snorted and furrowed his eyebrows.

"What are you saying after all this. A huge sinner like that can't be forgiven for taking a walk while pretending to be a human! Don't make me laugh!"

"I know that. About that, I'll explain it to the Chairman later! That's why, get out of the way!"

On top of revealing the circumstances, Takeru asked him to lower his weapon.

The weapon was a huge dark green cannon. It was too big to be called a shotgun, "The Malleus Maleficarum V “Nero”" was engraved on it.

《"Wahhaha! What a man, as if it'd be that convenient for you! A sinner should be more ferocious!"》

"?!"

《"The azure one chose such a weird guy for a host."》

In his head resounded a magical resonance... it was Yoshimizu Akira's voice.

《"Nice to meet you～♪ I'm called Nero. Take care of me from no——well, there's no need for that. After all, you'll be killed by my master right noww!"》

A hysterical laughter resounded in his head.

There were no remnants of her previous self, after all Akira's voice was always bright.

"...why does it have Yoshimizu's voice?!"

"..........."

"Answer me, Kyouya! Why is your Relic Eater——"

"——Shut up! Say no more!"

Losing himself in anger Kyouya shot at Takeru's blade.

Using the opportunity Takeru flipped his sword and jumped up, emptying the place he was in.

This is bad. Kyouya's aim was something else, it wasn't Takeru.

Behind him, fallen on her butt, was Kiseki.

"——Aaa!!"

Takeru exerted all the power there was in Soumatou and instantly moved in front of Kiseki.

"Buckshot!"

After being instructed by Kyouya, a grave sound of something charging could be heard. The moment Takeru jumped in front of Kiseki, a lump of magic resembling a buckshot burst out towards Takeru.

Unlike normal bullets, the magical buckshot was attacking entire surface rather than a single point. Even if he intercepted one bullet, it was impossible to block multiple bullets fired at the same time.

Takeru thrust his sword into the asphalt and raised it up all at once. The ground burst out, and asphalt's debris rose into the air.

Although he attempted to use it to block a number of magic slugs, there was no way such a thing would block a Relic Eater's attack.

The asphalt was broken through and the buckshot struck Takeru's body.

"!!"

There was damage to his shoulder, right flank, and there was slight damage to his left thigh. It wasn't a large amount of damage, but it would turn into large damage were that repeat multiple times.

There is no other choice but to go for it!

"KYOUYAAaaaaaaa!"

It was possible to deal with a shotgun by moving to a wide space, but escaping while holding Kiseki in this situation wasn't a good idea.

Because he had someone to protect, he couldn't distance himself. He lowered his posture and drew closer at one stretch like a leopard.

Takeru's speed should have been too great for one to keep up with by using one's sight.

In the slow-motion world Takeru saw that in the vicinity of Kyouya's temples, a vast number of blood vessels emerged and he saw Takeru.

"Kusanagiii...!"

Kyouya's eyes filled out with blood and he captures Takeru's movement.

Impossible, it should be impossible for him to be seen. Human reflexes were——

——*No choice but to do it!*

Kyouya aimed his muzzle, Takeru poised his blade, and at that rate both of them would attack each other clashing head-on.

At the moment the two were ready to deliver to blow to one another, that's when.

"——That's enough, both of you."

Along with a sound of a hammer, a sombre voice could be heard. Both Takeru's and Kyouya's movement stopped. Kyouya's muzzle was aimed at Takeru's forehead, and Takeru's sword was right at Kyouya's neck.

Both of them captured each other's vital points and stopped themselves at the very last moment.

At both of their temples, revolver muzzles were pressed on.

The one on the right was jet black, on the left there was a huge silver revolver they have seen for the first time.

"Turning into Witch Hunt Form on the streets. Taking hostile actions towards allies. You guys, I wonder if you're prepared to receive the punishment?"

The man hailed as the strongest among all the Dullahans, Kurogane Hayato.

Hayato held his gun up to the two's heads and released intimidating aura.

They noticed, Spriggan Dragoons and personnel has gathered and surrounded the two.

"Dismissed. If you intend to continue, try taking me down first."

The one who stepped down first was Takeru.

And Kyouya——hasn't withdrawn.

The moment Takeru moved his blade away from Kyouya's neck, Kyouya's Relic Eater fired.

What followed that was shot into the sky. Just in time Hayato averted Kyouya's barrel with the silver revolver. Subsequently he bombarded Kyouya's shoulder with the black revolver, Caligula.

Rather than a sound of gunfire, it was a sound of artillery fire.

The blow which seemed like a tank cannon's fire emitted from Caligula had blown Kyouya's body far away.

"Fool."

Hayato glared in the direction Kyouya was blown away into and then holstered his guns.

After a moment in daze, Takeru immediately looked towards Kiseki. A female Dullahan has already put on a headset-type Gleipnir on her.

Kiseki looked resigned, and has quietly accepted the Gleipnir.

Takeru cancelled the Witch Hunter Form and tried to run up to Kiseki.

"W-wait a moment! Let me talk for a——guohh!"

At the same time as he reached out to her, his left arm was grabbed and raised, he's been held and pressed to the ground.

"Who told you to move."

"I understand, but, please. Just for a little, let me speak with Kiseki...!"

Ignoring his plead, Hayato rotated Takeru's arms behind his back and handcuffed them.

Unable to get up, he tried to look up at Kiseki from the ground. Suddenly, he was grabbed by the neck and made stand up forcefully.

"Two minutes."

"...captain Kurogane."

"The count has already begun. Hurry."

Hayato pushed his back roughly and told him what was the time limit. It wasn't time to think how much was left.

While thanking Hayato in his mind, Takeru moved closer to Kiseki.

"...sorry... we got caught immediately. And here I thought I'd show the outside world to you."

"No, I had a lot of fun. Moreover, it's all Kiseki's fault. Apologize to Ouka-san and the others too from me."

Kiseki made a thin smile and looked up at Takeru.

Takeru too, chagrined and his eyes moistened, he burned Kiseki's appearance into his heart.

"...definitely, I will visit you again... wait for me."

"Yup. I'll wait. I'll be always waiting."

"...... Kiseki, I——"

Unexpectedly, Kiseki threw her arms around Takeru who had his arms bound.

She embraced him weakly, Takeru's hand behind was strongly twisted.

The tears on her cheeks wet his neck, and a hoarse voice whispered into his ear.

"That promise... make sure to fulfill it. Kiseki will——"

It was when Kiseki tried to tell him the last word.

Power left Kiseki's body and she collapsed from Takeru's shoulder.

He was unable to support her, and was only able to look as she fell forward.

The comatose drugs embedded in the Gleipnir were administered. Although two minutes still haven't passed, why did...

Although he tried to protest to Hayato, Hayato didn't look at Takeru, but behind him.

"——What a moving sibling love. Even for me it was hard to get in between the two of you. But this is my duty, it can't be helped."

A white-haired man has come out from between the Spriggans who surrounded them.

Inquisition board's Chairman, Ootori Sougetsu. While raising his bangs, the ruler has moved in front of Takeru.

"...you understand what I mean don't you, Kusanagi-kun."

Takeru faced down and fell silent. Sougetsu quietly closed his eyes and continued indifferently.

"I'm not blaming you for fighting in the middle of the town. The one responsible for that is Kirigaya-kun. I have no intention to blame you, I have cancelled Lapis' restriction in advance so that you could protect yourself."

"…………"

"However, assisting a fugitive with a designated danger class… that's a splendid crime. Even if she's your little sister, that's no exception. It should have been immediately reported to me."

"…………"

"…I'll inform you of your punishment later. You should cool your head off in the cell."

Sougetsu turned around with a twirl and started moving away with loud footsteps.

Even though Takeru felt Hayato's presence behind him, he still called out to Sougetsu.

"…what will happen to Kiseki?"

"By what, you mean?"

"I don't care what happens to me. But, any more than this… please don't worsen Kiseki's treatment. I beg you."

While still constrained, he awkwardly lowered his head. Sougetsu smiled wryly.

"It seems like there's a misunderstanding. Despite how it seems, I intend to protect Kiseki-chan… you're saying it as if I was treating her badly."

He raised both of his hands, shook his head exaggeratedly.

"Well, I'll have to tell you that sooner or later anyway, let's talk here then. In fact, after speaking about her with Alchemist, they have offered to cooperate with me with their all. Thanks to that, there's a prospect of controlling Kiseki-chan's power. What you were seeking for many years now… rejoice, with this she will no longer be at mercy of her power."

"…i-is that true?!"

Suddenly hearing good news, Takeru's eyes shone.

Sougetsu turned around to Takeru and smiled gently.

"I might not be a good person, but I don't lie. With this, Kiseki-chan will surely be saved."

From Takeru's eyes, a single tear spilled.

He knew that was difficult even with all the power Inquisition held. The reason Takeru was relatively cooperative was because of his little sister. The only ones who could do something about Kiseki's power was Inquisition.

At first he wasn't convinced. When he enrolled in AntiMagic Academy too, in order to set Kiseki free he flared up at Chairman and said "I’ll knock you down from that seat".

He's grown compared to back then, he understood that Kiseki, as a dangerous existence has to be imprisoned and he has revised his defiant attitude towards Sougetsu.

He could do nothing but rely on him. No matter how the other dirtied their hands with blood, as long as there was a possibility, there was no other way for him but to commit himself.

Takeru accepted the limit on the visitations as well the expanses, and took part of the burden upon himself.

One way or another, he believed that he'll obtain strength allowing him to grant her normal life.

It was true that Sougetsu was a disturbing man. Takeru too, continued to doubt him and believed he will sacrifice everything for the profit. That didn't change even now, he couldn't trust this guy.

However, if Kiseki's power could really be controlled...

"But... there's one, regrettable piece of news."

Sougetsu said to Takeru, who was moved to tears by the hope.

"We will transport her the day after tomorrow, she is supposed to be moved to a different location. The innermost prison's cell has been destroyed, Kiseki-chan will be moved to the facility that was built in cooperation with Alchemist."

"Alchemist... different facility... and where is that?"

The direction this it started to go was disturbing, and Takeru became anxious. Sougetsu stood in front of Takeru, stopped smiling and turned expressionless.

"I won't tell you."

"That's... then, visitations...? If it's money, I'll pay it! Even if it's in full! Somehow m——"

"No. That cannot be allowed. The possibility she might be targeted by Valhalla is high, if something like this happens again, other executives won't stay silent."

Once and for all, he rejected all of Takeru's hopes.

"I'm sorry, but until Kiseki-chan's treatment is complete, you won't be able to meet her. The reason you were able to meet her up until now, was because it led to her suppressing her power, this time, she went berserk because she wanted to meet you, it wasn't because it had accumulated."

"............"

"She, has reached puberty after all. Just like you, it's hard for her to control her heart. As Kiseki-chan grows, so does her power. It has reached the point where we cannot suppress it by ourselves."

Sougetsu drove an arc in the air as he moved his mouth to Takeru's ear and whispered.

"I want you to understand... this is all, for yours, and Kiseki-chan's sake."

Enveloped by despair, Takeru overlooked the asphalt on the ground with empty eyes.

Even if he disagreed, he couldn't defy him. What Sougetsu was saying, was endlessly reasonable.

What is the right thing to do... he wasn't even given grace to think like that.

Sougetsu grasped Takeru's shoulder, and squeezed it strongly enough to have nails bite into him.

"Oh right... you received an invitation to join the dissidents from Hoshijiro-kun right...? I don't know how you answered her, but restrain yourself from actions that would make you lose credits. Think of it as part of the reason you're denied visitations."

"............"

"It's so that you don't turn into an enemy... that's how it is."

As if being hit by the truth, Takeru was at loss for words.

He knew... everything.

That Takeru tried to shift from the current status quo to rebelling was seen through.

Without saying anything else, Sougetsu left and Spriggans retrieved Kiseki.

Takeru absent-mindedly looked at the sky.

He felt Kiseki's hand he was connected with separating from him. Contrary to Takeru's heart, the sky was sunny and clear.

Clouds, crows, there was nothing. That was the only thing similar to Takeru's heart.

The boy continued to be tossed about. By his own powerlessness, because of his shallow prudence he continued to suffer grief.

You're definitely not the one who's holding the reins.

Takeru noticed the truth and reality he was in. You cannot do anything. You can't do anything about your little sister. That's why don't stretch yourself, just be carried by the flow.

That's what the sky was telling Takeru.

Chapter 4 - Kusanagi Takeru

——The sky; about 20,000 meters above the ground.

There was a single stealth transport aircraft flying across quietly.

Inside of a dim cargo compartment; there, seating without seat-belts was a girl in a full body suit along with a face-covering helmet, and a man dressed in kimono.

"A surprise attack from the sky huh... Mother has thought of such a reckless strategy."

The man, Valhalla's Orochi cleared the ash from his pipe dropping it on the floor and grumbled. The girl who was sitting next to him who was performing a check of her micro-machine gun's long magazine responded to him absent-mindedly.

"The cult is also desperate, we can't complain."

"Ha, ya turned real cheeky haven't ya, Diluted-chan... hop."

Orochi stowed the pipe in the pocket and kicked the lump of iron that was standing in front of him.

The girl too, glared in vexation at the lump of iron which was the reason the transport flight was gotten cramped.

"...the two of us are enough. There's no need for a doll like that."

"That's cause these guys are only good for the times of war, but it's true that they ain't cut out for operations like this one."

"... 《Eienherjars》, disgusting."

"Well, a Hero's better than some John Doe. We're the ones who summoned 'dis shitty Hero, well, as long as it achieves the purpose."

Orochi made a huge yawn and put a hand on the sword by his waist.

After finishing installation of magazines and confirming the amount of bullets remaining, the girl bumped both of her fists against each other.

《"Three minutes have passed since the enemy convoy has departed. I'm opening the hatch."》

From the speakers fitted in the cargo hold, a voice that seemed like the male pilot's resounded. At the same time, the red lamp turned green and the hatch dropped down with a heavy sound.

Moonlight entered the cabin and a powerful wind flowed inside.

Thanks to the light, the iron lump's identity was exposed.

They were already-activated jet-black Dragoons, they numbered twenty.

All of the machines were unmanned. They were originally created under the assumption they wouldn't be piloted by anyone.

Pseudo-Heroes summoned with a special catalyst, Magical Dragoons. Developed by Alchemist, they were adopted by Valhalla. Inorganic golems into which a Heroes were summoned. All of the machines had a Hero's soul inside.

The eyes of the machines were glowing red, it seemed ferocious despite being inorganic which made them seem eerie.

《"Catapult ejection——dropping the Magical Dragoons."》

After the pilot reported, the Dragoons started their boosters and were ejected one after another.

The girl and Orochi rose up, they put their hands on the wall near the hatch and were exposed to the wind.

"'Aight, let's do this. Let's confirm the strategy."

"…………"

"The only one who'll be actually flying is you. Confirm the target with your own eyes, in case you can't do that, drop down all the transport aircrafts there are. Me and those Heroes will clean up all the vehicles on the ground."

"Roger."

"Hey, Diluted."

Orochi put a hand on the girl's shoulder and lightly patted her face.

With a serious expression, his attitude was unlike the light-hearted one from before.

"Listen, don't take any other actions than flying and don't pull your sword out. The damage that thing does is too large. If you do it poorly you'll involve the civilians as well."

After being told that, the girl held the handle of a huge two-handed sword she had in the sheath on her back.

It had an disproportionate black sheath made of inorganic minerals and the sword had a characteristic flame-like pattern.

The girl stared at the weapon that emitted strange, hot air.

"…………"

"Reply properly. If you pull it out I'll cut your head off."

"............understood."

After hearing a reluctant reply, Orochi has taken out a black crystal from his breast pocket.

"I'll activate the instant charm's operative procedure. The transfer magic will be activated in thirty minutes. Also, it's something valuable so make sure to give it back. Finish your mission in time and join up with me, if you can't do that, I will leave you behind."

"Yeah."

"It's not 'yeah', but 'roger'."

"Roger."

After saying OK, Orochi leaned forward in order to start his descent.

"Wait. Orochi, where's your parachute?"

"No need for one. I'm in charge of the ground after all."

"...monster."

"I don't want to be told that by you——I'll be going ahead!"

After declaring that, Orochi ran outside with a crouching start.

The girl followed him, springing out into the sky.

With hatred towards the light of the city spread below, the girl cut through the air to enter the combat.

At the same time, over ten thousands meters above the ground.

It's been five minutes since the Kusanagi Kiseki's convoy operation started.

The transport convoy consisted of three aircrafts and seven ground vehicles which started moving out from the Inquisition's Headquarters at the same time. They spread out all around going in different directions and headed for different destinations to act as decoys.

All the aircrafts were dummies. One of the vehicles enclosed by seven cars on the ground was the convoy vehicle that held Kusanagi Kiseki inside. With all the dummy vehicles there was at least one member of the EXE.

This machine's guard was Oonogi Kanata. Previously she acted alongside Kurogane Hayato, it was the Banshee woman who trailed Ikaruga who was heading to Alchemist.

"A report from the inner citadel?"

Kanata opened the cargo compartment's door and asked the Spriggan pilot in the cockpit.

"There were no problems so far. The dummy vehicles and the transport aircrafts didn't report any abnormalities."

"...please be cautious. If the enemy is coming, then the possibility of an attack from the sky is high. Act earnestly."

"Hahhaaha, I doubt the witches would have a fighter plane. It's all right, we're armed in here, there's no need to worr——"

The pilot's speech ended there.

The copilot saw something in the sky, it was quite a distance away and traveling in their direction.

"Hey! What's that?!"

He looked like he couldn't believe it and pointed at the sky.

The place their line of sight was attracted at... had a human figure with an opened parachute in it.

"You must be joking right...? Sky-diving at such time? At this altitude?"

"——Intercept it immediately! Shoot it down!"

"Ha?"

"Hurry up!"

"No, but... a transport aircraft shouldn't shoot a normal huma..."

In the meantime, the figure with an opened parachute approached steadily. It was something unbelievable, but their intersection was clearly predicted.

It was perfectly heading in their direction.

At this rate, that figure would without a doubt hit the transport aircraft.

Momentarily, the figure disconnected the parachute.

It's body was rounded and it has began to glide in the direction of the transport aircraft. No. It was clearly flying.

No way?!

Kanata was surprised that a human started to fly in the sky. The figure stretched its body and pulled out two machine guns with loaded magazines from her hips, she turned the muzzles towards the cockpit of the transport aircraft.

Just as he was told by Kanata, the pilot opened fire at the figure.

The bullets were shot in rapid fire and grazed the figure.

However, since the figure was a bit higher, it didn't hit.

The figure bypassed the bullet storm——and opened fire from its machine guns towards the cockpit.

The cockpit's window that normally wouldn't be penetrated by a machine gun has cracked, and the bullets took down the pilot and the co-pilot.

Kanata immediately jumped back.

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——Malleus Maleficarum!"

At the same time as she made a declaration of summoning a Relic Eater, the figure slipped in from where a window glass should be. But there was no way to avoid impact after entering a transport aircraft that flies at 500 kilometers per hour.

The figure with a full-face helmet got in contact with Kanata and was flung towards along with a dull sound.

After further passing through the space, they slammed into the strong hatch of the cargo hold.

The hatch has completely collapsed as if it was hit by a cannon, and the transport machine shook violently on the impact.

A normal human being would probably die, but Kanata barely managed to finish changing into Witch Hunter Form and was still alive.

"Ghh! ...y..ou...!"

"——! A Relic Eater!?"

Surprised by the lead-colored armor Kanata was wearing, the figure took a deep breath.

I'm the one surprised, thought Kanata. There was no way she could predict that there was someone who would suddenly plunge into the cockpit.

Kanata tried to take out the figure that attacked her by surprise and was aiming the machine guns at her abdomen by delivering a kick to its abdomen. The attacker was blown away by the shock and rebuilt its posture.

She pulled loose her body that was stuck in the hatch and entered battle readiness.

Both confronted each other with a glare.

The transport aircraft is already falling... at this rate it'll crash into the ground. I need to defeat this guy and grab the controls. Moreover, my Relic Eater isn't cut out for close combat.

Her Relic Eater was 『Nobunaga』, a sniper-rifle type.

Its intrinsic performance was to have greater power the greater the distance was, from up close it was no different from a normal rifle. The enemy's weapon were two machine guns, they had strangely long magazines. They didn't appear to be a Magical Heritage, but paired with the enemy's ridiculous toughness it amounted to great fighting potential.

Rather what's up with him... why is he alive after a collision at 500 kmph?! I don't get it!

She continued to glare frustrated, the attacker in the body suit opened its mouth.

"This seems like a miss. Hey, you."

"...talking with the enemy isn't my hobby."

"I have no use for this place any longer. If you overlook me, I'll overlook you. Escape with a parachute."

It said these words with a fragmentary speech, Kanata was dumbfounded.

But soon enough she vented out, and laughed quietly.

"O-overlook? You, will overlook me?"

"Yeah."

"Hahaha, don't make me laugh! You damn brat!"

Screaming angrily, Kanata aimed Nobunaga's muzzle at the attacker.

The attacker crouched and protruded the machine guns in front.

"――Don't look down on Inquisitors!"

Kanata released a single hit from Nobunaga. However, the attacker followed the attack and avoided it with ease.

Not surprised by the fact it was avoided, Kanata rushed towards the attacker instead while raising a cry.

"HAAAAAAAAAaa!!"

Despite having her body bathed in the machine gun bullets, she jumped into the enemy's bosom.

The surprise attacker rotated its body and swung the machine gun with its long magazine like a tonfa, aiming at Kanata's chin. Kanata received that blow with her upper left arm.

Although it was powerful, it wasn't enough to break Witch Hunter Form's armor.

Kanata didn't miss the gap in the enemy's defense when she blocked the attack, and grasped attacker's both hands.

"I caught you...!"

The attacker was shocked, Kanata raised a foot high up.

The enemy took a defensive posture——however, Kanata hasn't intended to attack. She kicked the hatch emergency opening button.

A heavy sound of the hatch opening all at once could be heard, and the two's bodies were flung into the sky from the transport aircraft and propelled by strong wind.

"Khh!"

As they were entangled in the sky, the surprise attacker distanced itself from Kanata with a kick.

Gently, the attacker grasped the handle of the sword on its back. Unbelievable red, shining wing-like particles appeared on the surprise-attackers back and the attacker flew away in a blink of an eye.

"............"

She could no longer see Kanata, she wouldn't have been able to escape before falling to the ground so being dragged to the outside was convenient for the attacker.

"Orochi told me not to pull it out but... it's problematic when the opponent has a Relic Eater."

The attacker continued the flight, and tried heading towards the second aircraft.

While flapping wings like a fly, fixing the track she turned her body to the west.

However, the fact that taking distance when going against Kanata put her in a fatal disadvantage was unknown for the attacker. The moment she forgot about Kanata's presence,

——vuooOOOOOON!

"Wah?!"

A bullet made out of an enormous lump of magic assaulted her back. The attacker fluttered her wings just in time, and managed to avoid it. However, one of the wings has been erased by the lump of magic.

"——From such a distance?!"

She looked in Kanata's direction. Far below, Kanata as small as a grain of rice started sniping by using the Relic Eater 『Nobunaga』.

Despite falling down, Kanata targeted her in middle of her flight and shoot accurately.

The attacker recognized Kanata as a threat beyond her.

"I can't beat her like that! Gotta run!"

She rebuilt the wings, and tried leaving again. However, no matter where she ran the attacks of falling Kanata always reached her.

"There's a report from Oonogi, there was an enemy surprise attack."

On the ground, in the convoy car that was running at full speed of several hundred kilometers per hour on a highway in order to exit the Kansai area, Kurogane Hayato heard a report from his subordinate. He wasn't surprised, they expected a surprise attack from Valhalla in advance. Rather, since it was evident they were aiming for Kusanagi Kiseki, they were able to lead them astray.

"Continue with current strategy. Maintain current speed and travel to our destination."

He issued a command to the driver, and went to the cargo hold in the rear. On the loading platform in something that looked like a container, there was a large Iron Maiden and a single man leaning with his back against the wall.

"...enemy's surprise attack has been confirmed. Be ready to go out at any time."

"............"

"...did you hear me? Kirigaya."

Hearing Hayato's strong tone of voice, Kyouya who was sitting on the bench raised his face up.

"I know it even if you don't tell me, Captain."

"............"

"By the way, just like the Chairman you've got quite an obsession when it comes to Kusanagi don't you. Normally there would be an application for sentence and imprisonment for him, quite soft aren't ya."

"What are you trying to say."

Without any expression and intimidating, Hayato asked. Kyouya laughed with low voice.

"...just like I said."

"............"

"Are you an ally of humans? Or maybe an ally of heretics?"

Hayato didn't answer, he just looked down on Kyouya.

"I'm bothered by you, the EXE's captain and Dullahan's top... doing half-assed job."

"You're not in a position to suspect me."

"I can do it even without you. If you're no one's ally, then don't get in the way of my revenge...!"

Kyouya stood up and glared at Hayato from below.

"I'll have my revenge...! And not only against that shitty necromancer! I won't discriminate and will erase all heretics from this world...! If you're not motivated despite being captain, then get outta my way!"

"...I see. So Nero prefers shallow guys like you. Ootori Ouka was an idiot as well, but you are on a completely different level."

As Hayato quietly provoked him, blood vessels appeared on Kyouya's temples.

All Hayato did was look at him coldly.

"I'm not interested in your silly revenge. I'm just going to "To enforce my own principles by acting as Inquisitor" and carry through with it. Don't compare it with foolishness like that."

"...you bastardd...!"

"Do your job properly. That is all I require of you. Keep your vomit-like aspirations inside your stomach."

Air atmosphere started boiling and Kyouya was about to grab Hayato's collar.

That was when the transport vehicle shook.

It has tilted strongly and they felt as if gravity disappeared for a moment.

The two supported themselves by putting their hands on the wall and somehow managed to keep standing.

"...so they came!"

Kyouya raised his face happily.

《"Objects have fallen in front! Those are——Dragoons! There are three machines! The car in front was crushed!"》

Kyouya heard the driver's shout and opened the container's hatch.

As the night breeze stroked his hair, Kyouya landed on the road and glanced in the direction the convoy's vehicles were traveling.

Because the transportation was secret and there were no regulations, on the road there was a lot of civilian vehicles. A number of cars passed by the convoy's side and started piling up in front.

The civilians immediately realized what was the cause.

Standing in the center of a huge crater in the direction they traveled were three mechanical dolls.

"Niiice... there's three heretics...! A good harvest... ain't it!"

His eyes were glowing, and Kyouya showed a glimpse of his sharp teeth, he trembled in joy and anger.

"...these are Heroes. I'll take on two of them, you deal with the one left behind."

Hayato left the convoy vehicle and lined up next to Kyouya.

"HAAa?! Don't say such bullshit——they're all, all mine!"

"Do as you please. But don't complain if you die after getting caught up in one of my attacks."

"That's my line!"

Kyouya stood while retracting half of his body and readying his gun, Hayato began to rotate the revolver's cylinder. In the middle of wave of people running away screaming, the two spoke the words of power on their own and at the very same moment.

" "Summis desiderantes affectibus——Malleus Maleficarum!" "

The two magical beings raised a signal to start the battle on the highway filled with screams.

* * *

A memory from the past has been revived.

Takeru was always able to clearly recall things from five years ago.

He and Kiseki had first met when they were around nine years old.

In the mountains of Touhoku region, existed the Kusanagi's house. The house itself and the site were large, appearance-wise it's been visibly ruined and believed to be a haunted house by people who lived below the mountain. In front, there was a sign which said 『Kusanagi True-Light style』, but because punks have drawn over it with a spray, most of the characters weren't visible.

Takeru grew up Inside of what was a dojo only in name; it could only be called a ruin.

He had a father and a mother, but he had no grandparents nor relatives. Takeru himself was never told anything about his family, and had no interest in it.

His mother was very gentle, but his father was very strict. He worked mainly by instructing swordsmanship in a different dojo, but it wasn't very lucrative. Moreover, for some reason his father was always covered with bruises.

From time to time Takeru was indoctrinated with swordsmanship physically and mentally by his father.

『"Cling to the sword."』

『"Swordsmanship is the only thing that establishes your existence."』

『"Don't be upset by anything other than swordsmanship, don't hate anything, don't rejoice over anything."』

『"The only thing you're allowed to do is swordsmanship."』

The same thing was imprinted into him on a daily basis. That was the education policy for men of Kusanagi house. From generation to a generation, men of Kusanagi family were quick to have blood rush to their heads.

Ever since he was a baby, because of a feeling of being cramped inside of him, Takeru went on rampages all the time.

Although he didn't get it, anyhow, the inside of his body felt as if it was too "narrow" for him.

Therefore, ever since childhood, men of Kusanagi house were drilled with swordsmanship. At first, his parents continued to leave them in pools of blood every day, indoctrinating them on the difference between weak and strong, on the pain got from the others, and on the pain they gave to others.

The children always started to think of winning against their parents, and started to yearn to learn swordsmanship from their parents, their hearts, technique, body and mind were trained.

Then by learning discipline and patience, they were able to overcome the『narrowness』 specific to Kusanagi household.

His father was strong. As an instructor of Kusanagi True-Light style his ability was impeccable.

However, Takeru had a talent beyond that of his father's.

On the other hand, he had more inhuman heart than anyone else.

That was why he was uncontrollable even despite learning swordsmanship and his temper was overflowing.

During his life among normal people, that flame of his was haunting him.

Having the Kusanagi house being called foolish was one of the reasons for that.

When he went to a normal elementary school, he was called the 'demon child', despised and sometimes even thrown stones at.

Takeru left the three who threw stones at him in all beaten up and bloody.

Even as his opponents were crying and calling for help, Takeru did not cease swinging down a wooden sword on them.

『"For a long time that household just causes problems doesn't it. Kusanagi-san and this one's father barely even work do they."』

『"It seems like they teach kendo in a dojo elsewhere, but one can tell it's not profitable if they look at the house. It seems like they don't want to work properly."』

『"...what's the point of teaching an uncouth anachronism like swordsmanship to kids, geez..."』

Every time Takeru heard the gossips in the neighborhood he went around destroying windows and glass in the nearby houses.

Every time, his parents apologized for him afterwards.

『"Why does Father and Mother lower their heads? They are the ones at fault."』

Takeru was unable to understand his parents' behavior and was dissatisfied. His parents explained it many times to him, but he never understood. The only ones he respected, was his own family.

He was endlessly irritated. It was narrow, way too narrow.

His heart screamed, and the scrabble inside his head continued every day.

It was a hot, summer day.

Inside of a deep forest, he squinted as intense sunlight peeked through from between leaves. He could hear a singing voice from somewhere.

Takeru followed that voice and continued to walk through the mountain. After moving what appeared in front of him deep in the mountains, was a big storehouse. That storehouse was placed in between cliffs and was built in a place where sunlight almost never reached.

It was a place he would normally never find. The warehouse itself was made of black stone which looked like it was painted with lacquer. It was cold to the touch, and it could be seen that it was reinforced many, many times. He realized that the reinforcement was also applied recently. The singing voice he heard was coming from inside.

It was a lullaby he heard his mother sing before.

As if invited, walked around the storehouse.

His feet stopped in a place he heard the voice best.

『"...hey, is someone inside?"』

From inside, he could hear a voice taking breath.

『"....a p-person? I-is someone there?"』

Seemingly frightened, the voice trembled. After he looked closely, at the bottom of the warehouse's wall there was a small gap. Takeru approached that gap and bent his knees, crouching.

『"You, what are you doing in a box like that. Are you a youkai or something?"』

『"Aa...uu...Kiseki is... called Kiseki."』

『"...I'm Kusanagi Takeru. You, are you human?"』

As he spoke to her frankly, a confused voice saying "Ah, umm, nn" came from inside.

After a while, something came out from inside.

It was a white finger.

Kiseki in silence poked her finger through the small gap.

『"............what is it."』

『"H...handshiook. When meeting people first...time... shake hands, is what Mom said."』

While saying it with poor wording, Kiseki tried her best to poke her finger outside.

Although Takeru was suspicious of it, he didn't intend to act rudely, and seeking a handshake was something normal. Although reluctant, he entwined his finger with Kiseki's.

Kiseki's finger was cold and it felt pleasant.

『"...ahh～♪."』

She let out a joyful voice.

Mysteriously, only when he was in contact with Kiseki, Takeru no longer felt the 『narrowness』.

After experiencing it for the first time, Takeru didn't leave the place and sat down nearby.

『"...you, why are you inside of a box like that?"』

『"I don't know. Ever since I was born, I was here."』

『"Hmmm. Well, it doesn't matter."』

『"Hey hey. I want, to talk."』

『"Talk, about what."』

『"About, outside. About, Takeru-kun."』

Kiseki said with an excited voice.

Normally, he would pass on talking with others, but when he was with Kiseki, the noise inside of his mind subsided for some reason.

From that day onward, Takeru started to go to the place Kiseki was in every day.

After speaking with her, Takeru's temper settled down to a certain extent, although he was still unable to adapt to others, he caused less problems at school.

His parents also welcomed that change.

——Until they learned that Takeru met with Kiseki.

One year has passed ever since Takeru encountered Kiseki deep in the mountains.

Takeru went to the box's location on daily basis. He himself didn't know why did he.

He was taught that swordsmanship is all there is, even now that thinking was unchanged.

However, strangely... only when he was speaking with Kiseki, he felt comfortable.

Only when he was together with Kiseki, he stopped feeling it was narrow.

It was extremely comforting.

『"I want to talk today too."』

Kiseki begged Takeru from inside the box like she always did.

They always talked about silly things. About how harsh was the practice that day, on how resilient the cockroaches in dojo were, how annoying the shitty brats from neighborhood were, about how he was called a catastrophe, it was nothing interesting.

Even so, Kiseki happily hit the walls of the box.

『"What kind of creatures are insects? I've never seen any."』

『"This deep in the mountains, there must be plenty of insects. Some must have entered your box right?"』

『"No, none entered here."』

『"Nothing entered through this gap?"』

『"Probably, insects are too afraid to enter here."』

Hearing that the insects are scared of her, Takeru faced down.

Ever since they met, he tried to avoid touching this subject.

For Takeru it was irrelevant, he didn't think there were any problems with it. That's why he always thought there's no need to consider it.

『"Hey...you, what are you?"』

Takeru casually asked her that question. Kiseki fell silent.

In silence, Takeru leaned his back on the box and felt a gentle touch.

『"...Kiseki is... Kiseki."』

Surely, Kiseki must have known her own identity, thought Takeru.

『"Didn't you think about going outside of there?"』

『"............going outside?"』

『"That's normal isn't it. I hate narrow places. I feel like smashing and breaking everything. Is it different for you?"』

『"Kiseki hates wide places. I never saw it, but I know I hate them. Also, I was told that I can't go outside. Kiseki was told that she's something that shouldn't be there."』

『"Who the hell told you that."』

『"Dad and Mom."』

『"That's no parent."』

『"............"』

『"............"』

『"............"』

『"You want to go outside, don't you."』

『"I hate wide places, but I want to meet Takeru-kun properly... I think."』

『"I got it, I'll get you out."』

『"...really?"』

『"I won't lie, there's no point."』

Saying so, Takeru stood up.

And he took out the sword he had by his waist all at once.

『"I'll take you out of there."』

『"I will save you no matter what. I promise."』

Takeru slashed the box's wall with the sword.

However, only a high pitched sound has come and the box was unscathed.

Even so, Takeru tried dozens of times without giving up, he continued to hit it with his techniques.

But the box wouldn't budge after all.

『"Hey, let's stop?"』

『"Why would we stop? When I'm with you, my heart doesn't scream that its narrow. That's why, I too, want to meet you, I want to be by your side."』

『"...Takeru-kun."』

『"Whether you can live or not, it's not something for others to decide. I hate that kind of thing..."』

『"............"』

『"I want to talk with ya face to face!!"』

His hand was numb, and it seemed like he was unable to bear the pain any longer.

Kiseki too, was the same. Held on a short leash, she only continued to live.

Who decided for her that she can't live. God? If such an arrogant thing exists, he'll cut its brain apart. He'll crush him, he'll crush it all.

Takeru remained expressionless, but the inside of his chest was overflowing with anger.

Yeah, narrow, too narrow. This body is too narrow to embody my anger.

What appearances. What 'ordinary' heart. My body is too small to afford such things to exist in it.

Just by having the anger in it, my body is already full.

Putting everything in, Takeru swung the sword down.

The moment he hit the wall, the sword's blade was blown away with a high-pitched sound, it has broken in the middle.

『"Damn...!"』

As he spat out a curse, once again he put strength into the broken sword.

But at that time, someone strongly grabbed his shoulders.

As he turned around, he found his father standing there.

His father's figure was bleeding despair, anger, and sadness.

He beat Takeru's cheeks with abandon and dragged him until he brought him back to their house.

The story he was told by his father seemed like a fairy tale.

In fact, it was a fairy tale. It was actually never told to anyone other than those of Kusanagi household, after hearing such a crazy story, no one would believe it.

The fact that Kiseki was Takeru's little sister, that Kusanagi True-Light style which was wielded in the battles originated from Kusanagi Double-Edged swordsmanship style that was used to fight fantastic organisms.

And, that the Kusanagi family has inherited a curse from ancient times.

Any and all of it, was unknown to Takeru.

『"Girls born from Kusanagi bloodline are always heretical."』

Takeru's father told him something so grave, completely indifferently.

In Japan, there were once fantastic creatures called 'demons'.

Demons had weird and bad characteristics. They didn't breed, instead they dwelled inside humans by 《Reincarnating》. After being defeated, the demon would be born again from another human's crotch. Kusanagi household from a generation to generation continued to live by subduing the demons. It was said that they killed an eight-headed dragon that came from mythical world once and have stolen Godly techniques. Since they were too reckless for humans to handle, Kusanagi held those techniques not minding self-destruction and ruin, they have slaughtered demons along with onmyoujis.

But even if they wiped all demons out, the demon's soul would conceive someone and a new demon would be born. In order to prevent demons from reincarnating, Kusanagi had onmyoujis seal all the demons in themselves.

In order not to have other humans give birth to demons. In order to prevent their spread.

Kusanagi have——carried the curse by themselves.

Like that, from a generation to generation humans of Kusanagi passed the name of demon's crystallization.

Hyakki Yakou.

That's how Kusanagi called the demon's very crystallization. From a generation to generation, people of Kusanagi family conceived and gave birth to a demon, and instantly killed it.

『"The ones born as Hyakki Yakou were only girls. For generations, the girls that were born to Kusanagi household were killed right after birth."』

However... his father chagrined and faced down.

『"The demon's power steadily increases every year, with my skill... I am no longer able to kill her. Whether I cut off her head or pierce her heart... Hyakki Yakou... Kiseki won't die."』

Ever since she was born, Kiseki held an unimaginable amount of power.

When father cut off her head, a new one has immediately grown. As soon as she was born, Kiseki has massacred the rest of the clan leaving only his father and mother.

『"That's weird. If Kiseki is a demon, then father and mother should have killed her. I would do so. That's why I think there's no way for her to be a demon."』

Takeru said.

『"Kiseki is gentle."』

He believed that she was definitely human, and there was no way he would believe she was a demon.

His father didn't say anything. Takeru thought that he was still hiding something, but because it was too ridiculous of a story, he didn't bother to ask.

『"Don't get close to Kiseki. That's... not something as gentle as you think it is."』

『"Why, I don't understand why not. I want to meet her. When I'm beside her, my heart isn't filled with noise. I don't know if I love her or hate her. But she is something necessary to me."』

『"...you too, started to say very human things haven't you."』

Half of his father's expression displayed joy, the other half was a complex and sad smile.

『"However, I cannot allow you to meet Kiseki. I can't afford to have you shoulder this burden. You must understand that..."』

Even despite what he was told to understand, he wasn't convinced.

Inside of Takeru, Kiseki's existence had already grown too large. Whether she was a demon or whatever, it no longer mattered.

Just by knowing the fact that Kiseki was his little sister, he was happy.

『"Does Kiseki know... that she's my little sister?"』

『"..........."』

『"...Father, I'm glad. I'm glad to have her as my little sister. Thanks to her, I was able to understand human feelings a little. A little more, and I feel like I could become a decent human Father told me to become. Please, don't say I can't meet with her."』

Hearing Takeru's words, his father stood up.

『"...forgive... your powerless father."』

What did those words mean, Takeru still didn't know.

For a few months after that, Takeru was forbidden to meet with Kiseki.

Forced to practice in a dojo elsewhere, Takeru had been away from home.

And, on a certain night under the new moon, a tragedy happened. As Takeru returned to the house, in the middle of the dojo he found his father and mother fallen down and bleeding.

Takeru's breathing turned shallow as he rushed to his father.

『"Take...ru... is it."』

『"What happened!"』

『"...........Kiseki has...left the box...I couldn't do it..."』

『"Do... do what...?!"』

『"I couldn't... restrain her any longer. Right from the beginning... I was hated by Kiseki. My inability to kill that child... was decided right from the beginning."』

With chagrin, his father grit his teeth.

He understood the story by seeing the sword his father gripped.

Overflowing with anger, his father pressed the sword's handle against Takeru's chest.

『"...you...choose."』

『"What... are you saying..."』

『"Now, only you can do it. You have involved yourself with her too much."』

『"..........."』

『"If possible... you were the only one I didn't want to shoulder this."』

While spitting blood, he grabbed Takeru's shoulder.

『"If you are one of Kusanagi... then you need to make a choice... just like I did."』

『"..........."』

『"...to kill... or to protect... you choose."』

Why was he trying to entrust this to him, Takeru didn't know that about his father.

Seeing his father's tears, he couldn't let out a voice.

『"That girl is human... born with a human heart, soul, and a body of a demon."』

『"...........what do you mean by that...?"』

『"And... you are..."』

Takeru opened his eyes wide and waited for next words to come.

But no matter how long he waited, his father never said it.

Before he noticed, Takeru walked through the mountain with a sword in his hand.

His gait was unsteady, he had no strength to tear through the vines and he unknowingly fell many times as he walked.

『"...Kiseki."』

Only able to call her by that name, he was dumbfounded.

He was too young to shoulder his own destiny. If it was Takeru from before, he would simply do what his father told him to do. But at the moment, Takeru's sword turned rusty. For Takeru, Kiseki was currently more precious than anyone else, she was someone he needed more than anyone else.

『"...Kiseki...where are you..."』

Takeru wandered as if seeking help.

He wanted to touch that girl as soon as possible.

He wanted to do something about this cramped feeling somehow. At the moment, the only one who could possibly understand him was only Kiseki. The two of them were alone in this world. Surely, world wouldn't forgive their existence.

I want to meet her. I want to meet Kiseki. Seeking her he walked through the forest. His father told him to either kill or protect.

That's why Takeru chose to protect.

It was obvious. Kiseki was his little sister. There was no hesitation, he'll protect her with his life on the line.

He will protest against this world that doesn't acknowledge her existence, with all the strength he has.

The speed at which he walked increased, and he started to run.

He ran, ran and ran... and finally, he reached the place his little sister was in.

『"—————"』

All his thoughts from before, his words, they were all blown away.

He overlooked the poor village from a cliff.

Under an eerie sky with only a single star shining, there was a single demon.

Clothed in white, a demon that looked like a girl.

However, the only part which was beautiful was the girl-shaped center. Other than that, her surroundings——were wriggling. It seemed like a mass of demons swirling inside of a pot, indescribable things were crowding in there. There were mouths everywhere. There were eyes everywhere. There were horns everywhere.

It was like a castle built in the ruins.

It was like a threat which continues to evolve.

It was like insanity blossoming.

The ground surrounding her was covered with meat, rocks, grass and trees were eroded and taken in as part of its own flesh.

It was appropriate to call that figure 'chaos' itself. The lumps of meat with an unclear fleshy or skin color were steaming, and the mouths were whispering. Calling him.

——Takeru

——Takeru-kun...where?

Calling Takeru's name, with love, loneliness, anxiety.

From the mountain's cliff, he could hear it echo throughout the mountains.

The demon chorus calling his name dearly ceased abruptly.

And numerous pupils embedded in the wriggling meat lumps moved, seeing Takeru.

『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『"Takeru-kun?"』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』

『" Ohh we finally meet "』

While shedding blood-like tears, the human form in the center turned around towards Takeru.

The pure white costume was dyed red near where her heart was, part of the girl smiled to him.

What he felt, was not fear. It was sadness. The surroundings were disproportionate and irregular, but that was a human smile.

I want to protect her. That feeling didn't change even now.

But what is this spectacle unfolding before me? Is this Kiseki?

Confidence to protect his overwhelming little sister from the public was gradually lost.

In the middle of wriggling meat, Kiseki single-mindedly smiled to Takeru.

And she said her single wish.

『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『 『" Kill me? "』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』 』

『" Kill Kiseki, Takeru-kun "』

As if responding to her request, Takeru started walking.

Despite not having any strength to hold the sword, he held it not allowing it fall to the ground.

He was finally able to understand what his father told him.

Surely, no one could kill Kiseki. There was no one able to kill her. However, if she were to desire death, if it was death by hand of her beloved one, Kiseki would surely accept it. She would gladly accept death by Takeru's hands and accept it peacefully.

He understood it to a painful extent. That was Kusanagi family's destiny. Surely his father, grandfather and also great-grandfather as well as their predecessors from long ago were burdened with Kusanagi's duty and have accomplished it. They have been shouldering this tragedy.

Kusanagi style's truth, was that of slaughtering the detestable comrades.

Takeru could do nothing but follow suit.

He couldn't protect. That's why, as one of Kusanagi he had to kill.

While stumbling through the wriggling variants, he walked up to Kiseki. On her forehead, there was a single, red crystalline horn. It was truly irregular and disproportionate enough to plight his mind.

Kiseki stretched a hand towards approaching Takeru's back and hugged him.

『"I always, wanted to be like this."』

『"............"』

『"Please, stop Kiseki."』

『"............"』

『"I can no longer do it myself. Kiseki's body is fulfilling her wishes on its own. At this rate, Kiseki might end up killing all people in the world. No more... I don't want to be any more honest than this. Don't want my heart to be forcefully exposed."』

『"............ngh."』

『"You promised... haven't you, right? That you will, save Kiseki."』

『"............"』

『"That's why... kill me? Takeru-kun."』

『"............kuh..uu..."』

『"I don't want dad, or mom... only by Takeru-kun... in Kiseki's world, there's only Takeru-kun."』

Takeru poised the blade to Kiseki's neck. She made a genuinely peaceful expression as if accepting everything. If he cut her off now, a gentle conclusion would have come. Only a member of Kusanagi would die, and Kiseki would have attained peace she desired by dying. There was no need to hesitate. After all, Kusanagi style existed to kill demons. After all, that was what Kiseki wished for.

——But, why was it,

——Why, was Kiseki so warm.

——Why, just by touching Kiseki he felt so comfortable inside.

『"...it's impossi...ble...?"』

Tears flowed down Takeru's cheek. Ever since he was born, it was the first time he cried.

『"Don't fuck with me...dam...mit..."』

The days he spent with Kiseki, every day they spent together separated by the box have flashed in his mind all at once.

It was all silly, but also irreplaceable.

Those days were incredibly dear to him.

『"Such thing... this is too much. Why is it... why, when we finally can be happy together, when the person who makes me human appeared, why do I have to kill her."』

『"..........."』

『"It's impossible...for me...! Because I love you, I'm endlessly scared of you...!"』

『"..........."』

『"I can't... kill my little sister...!"』

Takeru dropped his sword and staggering he moved away.

Without a doubt, he was frightened. Seeing Kiseki, Takeru got scared.

Kiseki was stunned, in the middle of lumps of flesh, she tilted her neck while looking at Takeru.

『"Onii...chan?"』

It was then, that Kiseki learned of Takeru being her brother.

Strength left his legs, and Takeru fell on his butt.

Kiseki was puzzled, and towards Takeru... she tried stretching her hand towards her brother.

『"Hiii...!"』

His fear was released outside.

Rather than being scared of Kiseki, he was scared of killing her. He was scared of having the emotion of cherishing his important person turn into something murderous.

However, this rejection was fatal to Kiseki's mind.

Seeing Takeru's frightened appearance, Kiseki's tears poured down.

『"AA...uu...UUuuu......!"』

In the middle of feeling rejected, loneliness came.

Wide, it was too lonely in this wideness. For a demon vessel, a human soul was too small. For the human soul, the vessel was too wide. Open, the body cried wanting to open. Expand your mind, flap your wings, her body demanded that of her.

The shackles called reason have collapsed and Kiseki's essence was laid bare.

『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』 『"Open."』

The lips attached to lumps of flesh started to sing like a chorus.

Demon acted like a demon, opened the spirit, and broke open the soul. Takeru's fear has bloomed and turned into despair.

The only existence that was her salvation, the only existence of her brother that comforted her could no longer give her salvation.

That's why, she wanted to destroy everything.

『"Aa, aaa...———————!"』

A scream that seemed like it would tear her chest apart has roared.

As Kiseki gasped painfully, the lump of meat started walking towards the cliff.

『"Stop... don't break it open...! Kiseki didn't think of that! I didn't want it! Kill me... save me, Takeru-kun...!"』

While tears continued to flow, she begged for Takeru to kill her.

『"...Kiseki...!"』

Takeru tried to reach out with his hands towards Kiseki who was at the centre of meat mass that was singing like a chorus.

But it was too late. Kusanagi Kiseki's soul has already flourished just as the demon body wanted it to.

The castle of ruin was delighted. It blessed Kusanagi Kiseki's blossoming.

Among the cheers and murmurs of the variant, Kiseki looked at Takeru in the end.

『"———Liar."』

That was the last word she said.

That's when Takeru realized he broke the promise.

With her back towards the cliff's edge, Kiseki's body fell down the cliff.

Takeru could only look at it, stunned.

After a moment of silence, the forest below stirred.

Where Kiseki has fell down——demons overflowed.

Hyakki Yakou flowed under the new moon. Like a flood, it swallowed the forest, swallowed people.

Screams acted like festival music praising the moonless night.

The demon's feast never ends. I won't end until it swallows the entire world.

Flames and smell of burning flesh attacked Takeru.

——It's your fault, all of it, is your fault.

Under the jet-black sky, screams echoed.

Takeru shook in despair for the first time.

He felt a bunch of emotions he didn't know. He felt a bunch of gentle emotions he never understood. He finally understood them, obtained them, because the girl with a body of a demon was there. Kusanagi Takeru could be born as a person because an existence called Kusanagi Kiseki was there.

On that day, Takeru lost it. All the tranquillity he had.

* * *

"..................Kiseki."

When he opened his eyes, he saw a dark ceiling.

Takeru was in a cold box made out of concrete. He raised his body from a simple pipe bed and leaned his back against the cold wall.

What was inside of the room, was a bed and a dirty toilet. Also, an entrance with iron bars in it.

He was in the Inquisition's prison. Two days had elapsed since they were caught by Inquisition after assisting a getaway.

"............"

It was the first time in years that he had a dream of the past.

Since then I... haven't changed at all.

Once again, he let go of his little sister's hand.

The circumstances were different. There was a prospect of fully controlling Kiseki's power. It will go well if he obediently obeys their words.

However, whether he could trust Sougetsu or not was another manner.

In any case, Takeru being forbidden from meeting her was a fact.

Like this... I can't protect her...

If he couldn't meet her, then there was no longer anything Takeru could do for her. At best, he could only continue to wait and possibly obtain permission to visit her by obeying Sougetsu. When he thought that, he realized that from the very beginning, she had been taken hostage and her existence was only used as such.

Takeru held his knees and crouched.

"...Kusanagi, did you wake up?"

Unexpectedly, a voice called out to him from behind.

He stared at the wall intently and asked fearfully.

"Ootori?"

"Yeah, I'm glad. It seemed like you had a nightmare so I was worried."

"You... why."

He placed a hand on the wall and asked.

"I'm the main culprit. I cannot allow all the blame to fall on you Kusanagi. That's why I surrendered."

"...you haven't let yourself get caught on purpose have you?"

"From the very moment I decided to prepare some time for you siblings I was prepared for this. Unless I do this I won't be at ease."

"............"

"A crime is a crime. It's natural to be punished for it."

Spitting a sigh because of Ouka's dignified tone, Takeru once again deposited his back on the wall.

Mysteriously, he could tell that Ouka also leaned with her back against the wall in the same place on the opposite side, inside of the room next to his.

Separated by the wall, the two sat down on the beds back-to-back.

"I'm sorry, Kusanagi. It's my fault it has turned out like this."

"...what are you talking about. There's no way it's your fault."

"But, I've heard that you were prohibited to visit her. Looking at the result, I have only robbed you two of valuable time together..."

Her discouraged voice and a sigh were colored with disappointment she felt towards herself.

"I am... no good. I haven't grown at all. I'm running in circles again."

"I was able to spend time with my little sister outside thanks to Ootori. It's something I feel grateful for, not a reason to blame you."

"Even if just a little, I wanted to decrease the burden you were carrying but..."

Hearing Ouka's words full of regret, Takeru thought of them as mysterious.

"...why would you go that far for someone like me?"

"............wait a moment? You're the one asking *me* such a thing?!"

With a momentum that made it seem she leaned over, Ouka displayed an excessive reaction.

"But isn't it like that? You, someone who doesn't allow crimes bent your own policy to shoulder our, siblings' sins... ain't that weird?"

As Takeru said so mystified, Ouka fell silent.

He was unable to see her facial expression because they were separated by a wall, but he heard a deep sigh.

Takeru was able to imagine her amazed expression.

"...I too had a little sister. I want to meet her but never will, I understand your feelings well. That's why I wanted the two of you spend time happily, even if it was temporary."

Want to meet her but never will. Those were heavy words.

Although he couldn't meet her whenever he wanted, meeting Kiseki and talking with her wasn't impossible for Takeru. But Ouka will never get a chance like that.

She's been already deprived of her beloved family.

"I... am grateful to you."

"...grateful?"

"Thanks to Kusanagi I can maintain my calm even in front of vicious criminals... I really feel better now."

"No way, that's just you——"

"Because I found comrades."

Hearing her say 'comrades', Takeru swallowed the words he was about to say.

"...I'm bad at expressing my emotions. Honestly, I don't know what to say... but, over the last few months, the 35th Test Platoon has comforted me. The platoon activities are peaceful, and you might think I turned cowardly... but that's the truth, it can't be helped."

"............"

"For me who lived only thriving on revenge, this stagnation is pleasant. I was able to grasp something I thought I would never grasp again. I no longer only push forward, but I feel like I have learned the importance of looking back."

"............"

"All of it, was given to me by you, Kusanagi. You are the one who changed me."

Ouka said so.

The fact I am moving in a good direction is all thanks to Kusanagi, is what she meant. Ouka continued to speak while pouting.

"Also there's that... don't forget that you forced half of my burden on yourself. That's why let me shoulder some of yours."

"...eh."

"T-to walk side by side... is what you said right? Don't you... remember?"

She squeezed out her voice.

Even if she didn't ask, it was something he said. He remembered it.

There were no lies in those words. As Ouka was walking through the darkness alone, he wanted to do something to support her. She was only seeking revenge, when her shoulders shook from anger, Ouka's back looked lonely.

Ouka overlapped with his past self, and he thought that if it's him, he would be able to walk beside her.

"...for people who walk together, when one person leans down the other supports them, is what I think. But if only one continues to lean on the other... it's no good."

"...why? I don't think I'm being leaned on by you at all."

"W-why you ask...! W-w-w walking together is that kind of thing! You're always bearing your comrades' burdens don't you?! I think that's a great thing to do as a captain, but you'll eventually collapse! T-that's why..."

Desperately trying to spin words, Ouka stammered.

"..that's why... umm...let me too...shoulder half."

"..........."

"Let me... walk beside you."

Despite mumbling, Ouka relayed her feelings to Takeru.

Being told that, there was no way he wouldn't be happy. At the same time, he started feeling uneasy. Being told to let others shoulder his burden was the first time.

Takeru looked down and made a self-mocking smile.

"...hey, Ootori. Do you remember the team deathmatch against classmates two years ago?"

"What's with you all of a sudden? I remember a little... at that time you were completely different from how you are now and you had a rebellious look in your eyes unlike now. You were just like me."

Just like me. Hearing those words, Takeru embraced a deep emotion.

Unexpectedly they were feeling the same... is what it meant.

"You said that I changed you, but you were the one to change me first."

"......?"

"I don't blame you for not remembering. All you did, was to beat me up."

"B-beat you up?"

Feeling nostalgic Takeru looked up at the ceiling with a wry smile.

"Yeah... I was all beat up."

Even at this moment Takeru could recall that moment clearly.

The team deathmatch happened immediately after they became 2nd years. Probably because he could no longer bear just having lectures in class for a year, he was burning with fighting spirit to show his swordsmanship he was polishing until that day.

He didn't feel like losing to anyone. He wasn't allowed to lose to anyone.

To change Inquisition and save Kiseki, he couldn't lose to anyone. He challenged her and lost, memories flashed through his head in defeat. He did all he could aside from using Soumatou, yet lost.

『"It's my win."』

The figure standing in the darkness which aimed the muzzle at him was incredibly beautiful.

I'm no match for her, that's how strong that impression was. The light in her eyes was similar to his own. This woman was living only through her strong will. For only one purpose, she stood up and polished herself.

She discarded everything, she rejected everything, those were eyes of someone who lived by hating everything.

Her cobalt blue pupils were deep and dark. Although they were similar to each other, there were places where places she was much darker in. Her eyes said "you can't catch up to me", "your true self is that of paper-mache", "you aren't allowed to line up next to me".

This woman, will be always ahead of me.

Vaguely, Takeru from that time thought so about Ouka.

"...at that time... I was super frustrated. After losing once, in order to confirm my determination I went to visit Kiseki. After going to see her, I was half in tears as I said 『"No matter how many times I lose, I will save you. That's the only reason for me to live"』..."

Feeling nostalgic, Takeru squinted.

"...Kiseki from back then didn't listen to me. Even during visitations, she was turned with her back to me and didn't show me her face."

"...is that so."

"But only at that time, she turned around to me and with an angry expression she said so."

Takeru squeezed his fingers into a fist and hit his own knee.

"『Onii-chan doesn't understand how Kiseki feels. Onii-chan doesn't understand feelings of other people. You will save Kiseki? Do you understand what does it mean to save someone?"』..."

"...that's... harsh."

"Yeah. As expected, even my reckless self from couldn't bear it."

With a wry smile, this time he hit his head.

"Since then... I, have started to think a little about how others feel."

After being told by Kiseki "Onii-chan doesn't understand feelings of other people.", Takeru stopped for the first time ever and started to look around.

What are the feelings of others? What does it mean to save people?

He asked Ikaruga that, and she was taken aback.

Takeru found himself desperate, and found himself telling everything to Ikaruga.

He started to change little by little. He began to understand others. At first, it was all for the sake of his little sister. In order to understand what was she thinking, what was she wishing for... wanting to know such thing was hard. He tried reading books, he tried to mimic behavior of an admirable main character. Takeru tried a lot of things and continued to seek it clumsily.

It was then that he entered the 35th Test Platoon. Back in those days, despite being clumsy he became able to think more like a human. Although he made distinctive comrades, all of them were strong and have repelled each other, the first one left, then the second and third. That's when he was entrusted with being a captain.

Honestly, he thought he was unsuitable for it. He wasn't skilled and he didn't understand what others felt, having others as his subordinates was reckless. It's still impossible for me, that was how he was thinking back then.

"It was at that time, that I reunited with you."

He met with Ouka, learned about her past, and it was then that his own self overlapped with hers in his mind.

We're similar, he thought. The sadness that tormented Ouka, anger, Takeru could understand it in its entirety. By overlapping his own feelings with hers, Takeru was finally able to understand other people.

Mari too, Usagi too and Ikaruga too.

He burdened himself with various pasts and embraced many problems. Every time, Takeru's own circumstances overlapped with that of the girls'.

That was why he wanted to save them. It seemed like that was the right thing to do.

Takeru started to become a captain because he was defeated by Ouka and reunited with her.

"...that's why the one to be grateful, is me. If you hadn't violently crushed me back then, my current self wouldn't be here today. I would have remained an outrageous and reckless idiot."

"...I didn't defeat you with such intention."

"Even so, I'm grateful. You are the one made me stop... you're my benefactor."

Being called his benefactor, despite being on the other a smile crept on her face and she started muttering something in an undertone.

After conveying all his feelings Takeru suddenly spat out a sigh.

"...I, have no confidence."

"? What?"

"I have involved myself with many people and I think my personality has gotten more decent than before but... in the end, sometimes I start to think it's just superficial, make-believe."

"............"

"Back at the beginning, my reason was to do it for little sister's sake. I tried reading books and think like decent human beings or pretended to be normal by imitating others... all of that stacked up and made me as I am now... that's why."

"............"

"In the end, I think it's something artificial and fake."

Takeru was always uneasy.

Even as he was shouldering the burden of his comrades, he only learned what is the right thing to do, wasn't that different from wanting to help? When he thought about that, he a had no reason to help his comrades. It was because they were his comrades, that's all.

Was it really accompanied by his feelings?

Wasn't he merely using a ready template?

Such a thought was always in a corner of his mind.

Ouka heard what worried Takeru, and exploded with laughter on the other side of the wall.

"...hey, people are seriously bothered here, it's not something to laugh about."

"Pftt... s-sorry... kufufu... you've got unexpectedly cute parts don't you."

"What cute... stop laughing about it, read the mood."

Dissatisfied, Takeru started strongly hitting the wall between his room and Ouka's.

"No, sorry... that's putting the cart before the horse. Kusanagi, if you really were a person who doesn't think of others, you wouldn't be agonizing yourself about such a thing right?"

"...eh."

"You keep taking action, haven't you become a fine person? You took action because you wanted to become a person who would save his comrades? That decides it altogether. Because you hoped for that, you took the righteous actions. Your motives are irrelevant. You took action, that is all."

Being told that, he realized that what she said was obvious.

Ouka laughed gently.

"You became a decent human. A clumsy human called Kusanagi Takeru. Soft-hearted, sharp in strange places, thinking of comrades... the captain of the 35th Test Platoon. If it's that, you can have confidence, I think."

You are lacking in many aspects though, Ouka laughed cheerfully.

"Puff up your chest. You are you. Kusanagi Takeru I know very well."

Those words resounded inside of Takeru's heart.

I'm glad, he thought sincerely.

"...thank you, Ootori."

"No need to thank me, I just said something obvious."

The two aligned their backs against each other through the wall.

"You are not alone, Kusanagi."

"............"

"I, we are with you. We're comrades. Your little sister... about Kiseki, let's consider about her together."

"............"

"Then surely... we will find an exit. It will be no longer impossible. That's what you always told us haven't you."

"...yeah."

"That's why this time, I will guarantee you that."

Ouka laughed and went silent.

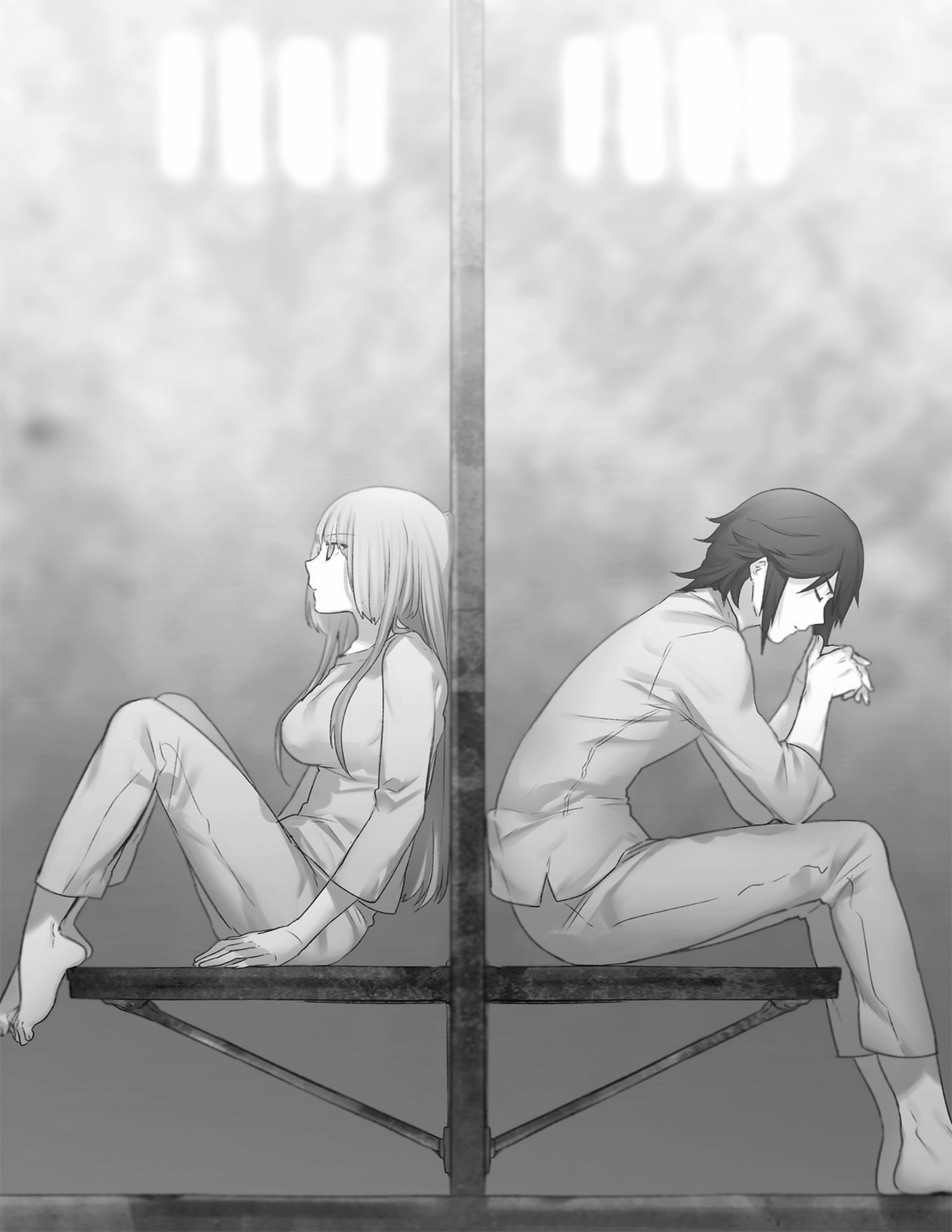
Walking together side by side. It was just like Ouka said it was, when one looks like they are about to collapse, the other supports them. Even if just a little, they help out. Takeru was sincerely grateful to have Ouka be in that position.

If everyone tackles it together, there's nothing impossible.

How reassuring words they were. Up until now, that's how the 35th Test Platoon has overcome all difficulties. There were results he could believe in.

That's why this time too, he believed.

That they would definitely protect Kiseki.



"…………"

The silence wasn't bothersome. Mysteriously, it comforted him.

Despite being separated by the wall, he could feel the warmth of Ouka's back.

For a while the two stayed silent, then suddenly someone hit the cell's door.

"Ummm... about here? Oh, there there, Kusanagi-kuun."

A strangely laid-back, disproportionate voice rang out from behind the iron bars.

Takeru stood up from the bed and approached the entrance.

"Yahho♪ I came to save you～."

The one who was there, was the student council president, Hojishiro Nagaru.

"President Hojishiro... why."

Ouka from the room next to his also saw Nagaru through the bars.

For some reason, in Nagaru's hands there were keys to the cell.

She opened the prison cells of Takeru's and Ouka's letting them out in silence.

"Why would president Hojishiro... save us?"

As Ouka asked, Nagaru put a hand on her hip and grinned.

"I've got quite a few acquaintances among prison guards. I asked them for a favour, to give me the keys."

"Wha... did you bribe them?!"

"How horrible～Ouka-chan... I've said that I have a lot comrades haven't I."

Nufufun, she laughed in a strange manner and puffed her chest proudly.

"But... why..."

As Takeru asked, Nagaru's expression turned serious.

"To have you in my debt... is what I want to say, but as expected, even I won't do such a dangerous thing for such a reason. I have an emergency report for you."

"Emergency, is it."

"Yeah. Recently, did you hear that your little sister's transportation started?"

"...no, I only know that it was to happen today..."

Takeru downcast his face slightly and tightened his fist.

Nagaru looked at his expression and conveyed in a cautious tone of voice.

"Calm down and listen. Kusanagi Kiseki... your little sister's convoy vehicle seems to have been attacked by Valhalla."

"............whaa."

He opened his eyes wide and turned completely stiff. So as not to upset him as much as possible, Nagaru continued with a calm tone of voice.

"Not much information from the field has been reported to me, but the battle has certainly started. Three transport aircrafts and seven ground convoy vehicles were attacked at almost the same time, surely it was a planned assault... surely, when the Hero attacked and Mephisto was contracted they were aiming for your sister as well."

"Why Kiseki...?! She's unrelated to Valhalla! Even Inquisition cannot control her... what do they want from my little sister!"

"...there's no time to talk about those circumstances. It's a secondary matter, but the civilians have taken considerable amount of damage. Moreover, if Imouto-chan is caught in combat... the town itself is in danger."

"...ngh..."

"I sent the coordinates to Suginami-chan's GPS. Leave this place to me, you should head out to the scene at once. If something were to happen..."

Even without being told that, Takeru launched and ran down the hallway. Ouka too, has followed him.

When they exit the Inquisition's disciplinary facility, at the exit there already were Ikaruga, Usagi and Mari waiting.

"...you four."

In response to Takeru's surprise, the three nodded lightly.

"We have heard the entire story from the Student Council President. Despite our poor abilities, the three of us will assist you."

"We can't just stay silent can we? Takeru's little sister is in middle of a crisis after all. Let us help out."

Usagi and Mari stood in front of Takeru puffing their chests proudly.

Ikaruga too, stood next to them.

"I can't participate in battle, and since this is sudden I didn't prepare anything. What I can do, is to drive a car at best."

Takeru's pupils shook from how thankful he felt, he bit his lower lip and raised his eyebrows.

When he tried to open his mouth, Mari and Usagi made a grand sigh.

"Even if you tell us not to, we'll come anyway! Just how many battles do you think we have went through up until now? Don't say such a pain-in-the-ass line after all this time."

"Good grief. If you say something like 'it's dangerous, don't come' or 'it's my problem'～ I'll hit you! In your vital point! It'll hurt a lot!"

The two suddenly puffed up angrily, Takeru shook his head a bit apologetic.

"No, honestly... having you help out is great. It wouldn't do if it was for me, but for my little sister... I want you to cooperate with me."

Because of his unexpected reaction, Mari and Usagi were stunned.

Since it was Takeru, they were already sure he would say "don't get involved". They looked at him mystified, but rather than at Takeru, they immediately directed their line of sight and stared at Ouka.

"W-what is it? Why are you glaring at me?"

"...Ootori, did something happen between you and Kusanagi in jail?"

"...ha?!"

"Having Takeru obediently agree to our help like that is strange. Something happened right?"

"You guys, this is not time for bothering about something silly like that, hurry up and get in the car!"

While being quite angry, Ouka pressed on Usagi's and Mari's backs.

As anger flowed through her head, Ouka looked back at Takeru and cleared her throat.

"Kusanagi, all Relic Eaters are released. What Student Council President said is all true... use Mistilteinn and go ahead. You should be faster than we are."

As Ouka said so, before he realized, in a slight distance away from the five of them he saw Lapis standing alone.

She was staring at Takeru expressionlessly.

"..........."

It was as if she knew everything, making his distrust grow.

It was obvious as she was a property of Inquisition but... not being told anything by her made him simply sad. Despite fighting together until now, Takeru didn't know anything about Lapis.

Lapis didn't show any of her feelings. Her attitude of just thinking of herself as of a sword wouldn't budge.

Thinking that the faint bond between them that he felt has grown was a misunderstanding, Takeru squinted.

"Takeru-kun."

From behind sounded Nagaru's voice.

He turned around and with a serious expression she compared Lapis and Takeru.

"...you can't trust Mistilteinn."

"...I know that... but right now, I need her power."

Nagaru knew well that Lapis was essential under current circumstances, she closed her eyes and nodded.

"Make sure to stay alive and come back okay? Together with Imouto-chan."

"Yes."

"Also, let me hear your answer from before. There's a lot I want to tell you from my side. About Imouto-chan's treatment, I'll show you that I can do something about it. I'll make sure to do something in the direction that will convince you..."

"............"

"That's why, be sure not to make the wrong choice."

She said so, and waved to Takeru. He nodded strongly and let spat out a breath with his eyes closed.

Under his feet, an azure magical circle appeared.

He raised his hand in front of him and opened his eyes wide at the same time,

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"

As if cutting through, he swung horizontally.

"——Malleus Maleficarum!"

And Takeru's struggle to help his beloved little sister began.

Chapter 5 - Kusanagi Kiseki

On the highway, the battle of two Dullahans against three Heroes has finally come to an end.

The convoy cars Hayato and the others were protecting were the main enclosure that had Kusanagi Kiseki within. At the moment, all convoy cars that acted as dummies were reported to have been attacked by Heroes.

After shooting the Magical Dragoons' heads off with Caligula, Hayato looked at Kyouya with a cool expression.

"...haa...haa...damn it...!"

Kyouya, supported his body with Nero and kicked the Hero's wreckage provokingly after defeating it.

He seemed to have reasonably struggled with it, the armor on his right shoulder was blown off and his shoulder was bleeding.

"...what happened, your arm's regeneration is being slow."

"............shaddup............"

"Or is it not being healed at all?"

"I've told you to shaddup...!"

As Kyouya tried to intimidate him with bravado, Hayato snorted.

"You boasted of being able to deal with three of them, and now your in this state. Don't show yourself so beat up."

"...tch."

Despite clicking his tongue, Kyouya didn't respond and remained silent.

Hayato put an intercom into his ear and sent a report to his subordinates.

"This is Kurogane, we have removed all obstacles. Enemy forces have surpassed our expectations by far. All members, what's the situation on your side?"

There weren't many replies. Most of EXE members seemed still be in combat and a few that were injured.

Only one out of three transport aircrafts was sunk. Although it seemed like Oonogi Kanata earned time by struggling, but she had currently slammed into the ground and could not move until she recovered from the damage taken.

The enemies were Heroes. During the attack on the school a few months earlier, there was data on it after it was repulsed by Kusanagi Takeru, but the truth was that none of the EXE members had any combat experience against them. Information that there was mass production of Magical Dragoons came, but there was no documentation left in the Alchemist. Fighting in a condition where they didn't know its strong or weak points, it was understandable to struggle.

For Valhalla to send this much force was unusual. If the existence of Kusanagi Kiseki was that important for them, it might turn into a bottleneck for the war to start. Moreover, on Inquisition's side they had another deterrent force in Twilight-Type.

Kusanagi Kiseki's existence cannot be left in enemy hands at all cost, if the balance of their forces is lost, some forces would defect to Valhalla's side and the war would be inevitable.

"...plan change. The enclosure and escort are the top priority. We will be going to head to the destination in advance, those who have finished eradicating the enemy at hand are to catch up and join us."

Hayato conveyed a change of plan to his subordinates and went back to the convoy vehicles.

However, he stopped and turned around on his heel.

He looked behind, facing the opposite direction of where were the convoy vehicles traveling to. Kyouya also followed his gaze.

In the distance, far ahead on the road——stood a figure that looked like a ghost.

Wearing an out-of-season kimono, with long hair reminiscent of a kabuki play. With both eyes firmly closed which indicated he was blind and horizontal scar running through his eyes. He was hitting the ground with a slender cane he held in one hand to ascertain the ground.

The man put a pipe in his mouth and started walking in their direction unsteadily.

"...hoooh, so it's here after all. It gives off a different sound from the other ones... as expected of my greatness."

With a strong tone of voice the man muttered to himself.

Hayato's instinct was tingling and warning him.

Intimidation could be felt just by having him nearby. It felt as if he was in a cave with everlasting darkness, he felt fear as if he was seeing an illusion of a non-existent monster staring at him.

That man, was a living being of a different quality.

"I'm the Valhalla's executive, Orochi. Nice to meet ya, Dullahan brats."

"..........."

"What, naming oneself is a courtesy of an adult——"

Hayato didn't speak, instead he slowly released a blow from Caligula.

The magic bullet that had the power of a tank closed onto the man.

However, on the verge of hitting the man the bullet momentarily released a spark and was blown away in a different direction. The bullet which changed the trajectory hit the building and penetrated it well.

Then he shoot once again in rapid succession. The result was the same, trajectory changed on the verge of hitting the man.

...before he realized, the man was holding a cane in both of his hands.

"...a sword cane."

"Hohou, a greeting ain't that. Two shots before saying anything. Ain't that a rude thing to do against someone with disability for a handicap... well, I understand yer not a man of words, yeah."

Yeah yeah, he nodded as he continued. The man called Orochi started to walk comfortably in his direction.

After hearing 'handicap' Hayato snorted, wanting to laugh. It was ridiculous to hear 'handicap' when the enemy had such precise defense. His unseeing pupils seemed to be more like something that gave him advantage. Hayato perceived that the Caligula's bullets were parried in an instant by the man with his slender sword cane.

He raised his voice speaking to Kyouya.

"You take the escort target and go ahead to the destination."

"....Aaa?"

"That's far beyond your league."

While still looking at the enemy, Hayato issued a command gravely.

Kyouya looked grumpy, but when he moved his line of sight at Hayato who was staring at the enemy, he clicked his tongue and obediently headed towards the convoy car.

"Kirigaya."

Hayato called Kyouya's name while facing his back to him.

"Don't lose control of yourself. In this world immortal monsters exist."

"............"

"Fulfill your duty, that's enough."

Saying that, he warned Kyouya. Kyouya stopped moving for a moment, then he boarded the vehicle without saying anything.

He grasped the handle and pressed the accelerator with abandon.

When the convoy vehicle left, Hayato and Orochi confronted each other.

"You fine with that? I'm super strong you know? Ya might have guts to go against me alone, but I've already seen through that Relic Eater of yours, there's no way you can stand against the greatness of my sword with that, you would need at least two Relic Eater users to be my opponent okay?"

With calm and composed appearance, Orochi laughed, raising his hands in a 'good grief' gesture.

In meantime, Hayato took out a single-action rotary handgun from the holster on his left hip in silence, he pulled it out while making a gunspin.

On the barrel there was an inscription saying "The Malleus MaleficarumII “Maximilien”".

"I admit, you are strong. Therefore, I will end it quickly."

Along with that declaration, he aimed the two handguns he gripped in each hand at Orochi.

Unlike Ouka's Vlad which was originally a pair, Hayato's Relic Eaters were two separate existences. Orochi's relaxed smile stiffened and sweat started flowing down his cheek.

"A h-hybrid?! Isn't that kinda unfair, even against me?!"

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"

"Gahh dammit, I got the short end of the stick! Ain't this kind of thing more like Diluted's opponent!"

"——Malleus Maleficarum!"

The impatient man, and Hayato who activated double Witch Hunter Form.

As not to allow Hayato clad himself in armor any more than that, Orochi attacked him in frustration.

On an empty highway, Kyouya was driving the convoy vehicle.

Uninterrupted by the wind that entered through the window, Kyouya laughed. Currently, Valhalla and Inquisition were scrambling over a single creature.

A fantastical organism that had top priority for extermination, "Hyakki Yakou".

Also known as Kusanagi Kiseki. An endlessly evolving life form that released a mysterious substance of an undefined "demon" ancient property. The only existence embodying entire chaos in this world. If it were to be left untreated and went rampant, this incarnation of bloodshed would toy with and devour all the people.

Such a fairy tail-like existence was currently being carried in the vehicle driven by Kyouya.

"Fu...kuku..."

He was carrying a weapon that could destroy the world.

"Hahaha... kuhahahaha..."

How unrealistic it was. How absurd. How——ridiculous.

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Kyouya released the handle and stepped on brakes. The vehicle tilted sideways and the tire slipped while smoking. As a recoil, piece of the convoy vehicles wheel flew away, it was nearly overturned but it has noisily rebuilt its posture.

He put his forehead to the handle, and his wide-opened eyes glared.

"No matter how I think 'bout this... ain't it weird... isn't Inquisition protecting a heretic putting a cart before the horse...?"

Kyouya jumped down from the driver's seat and opened the hatch of the convoy vehicles by using Witch Hunter Form.

"Do you duties seriously, that's what you said right? Captain."

What appeared in front of his eyes was a huge coffin.

He inserted the identification card and input emergency security code, unlocking it.

At the same time as the door's locks were disengaged, white steam overflowed from inside. The door opened automatically, and Kiseki's figure restrained by belt restraints appeared from the inside.

She was sleeping. Sleeping while not seeing any dreams. No matter how heinous monster she was, she slept after being administered by sleeping drugs. He started thinking whether she was really an immortal monster or not.

"How about we check it... whether it's really immortal or not...!"

He pressed the gun's muzzle that was merged with his arm against Kiseki's chest and made an insane smile.

Kyouya didn't tolerate magic. He didn't tolerate witches. He didn't tolerate fantastic organisms. He didn't allow any kinds of heresy.

If concept of magic didn't exist, Kyouya would have lost this many things. No matter what people said, 15th test platoon was the only place he belonged to. For Kyouya, his comrades were something he would give his everything for.

For Kyouya, Yoshimizu Akira——his childhood friend, was his only salvation.

He was raised by his parents who were scum, his environment was full of scum, and he himself grew up to be scum, it was Akira who made him take the correct path. His comrades were all small-time folks similar to him, without any special abilities, their performance was very ordinary, if anything only their pride was high.

And yet, they still joined hands and did their best. As to be acknowledged by ordinary people, they worked hard together. Although they quarreled a lot, they never did anything underhanded.

Everyone followed a small-time captain like him.

He was happy, he wanted to protect those guys.

And despite saying that, although he intended to do so,

A heretic stole all of it———!

"It's your fault... you stole everything from me...!"

It wouldn't leave his head. His chest was pierced and he fell on the ground not knowing what happened, when he looked up faintly conscious... Akira's figure shattered... whether he was awake or asleep it didn't disappear from his head. He couldn't stretch his hand out. He couldn't even roar in anger.

While making an insane chagrin, Kyouya covered his face with his left hand, the blood vessels inside his body were pulsing.

"If something like you didn't exist...!"

He couldn't do anything. That's why Kyouya was roaring now. Even though he knew it's too late, he still roared. One day, this howl of his will turn into a song of revenge, that was his wish.

Kyouya laughed angry and insane.

"Nn...hn...?

Kiseki who had a gun's muzzle pressed against her chest woke up faintly.

It wasn't the coma drugs that wore off. Hyakki Yakou woke up without fail whenever her life was in danger.

"...aaa...!"

Seeing Kyouya in front and pressing his gun's muzzle against her, Kiseki's face stretched out in fear.

It was an expression of someone not understanding anything, a scared one.

Kyouya looked at that appearance of hers, and laughed fiercely.

"Good night, *monster*...!"

——Once again inviting the demon to enter world of dreams, the cannon's roar was incredibly violent.

"——Lapis! Can't you raise the speed any more than that!?"

《"Any more than this would be too reckless. There will be no magic power left to use in battle."》

"I don't care! It's fine just send me flying!"

Takeru was traveling from a building to a building by using Lapis who transformed into Kusarigama and pulling himself with it like a spider. Magic particles overflowed from the armor and strengthened his leaps.

It was no time to be bothered with appearances. The city was being noisy and people were running for their lives towards the shelter entrances.

The city was crowded with people.

It was as if the city itself was frightened by something and bound by impatience.

《"Straight ahead——120 meters away."》

"Roger...!!"

Takeru hooked the kusarigama on the last building and jumped over the building by pulling it with abandon. The scenery has opened in front of him, and highway has entered his field of vision.

He his line of sight ran through the road looking for the convoy vehicles.

——*There it is!*

After following a trail of tires that broke off because of sudden braking, he found the convoy vehicle which stopped in its tracks.

Takeru turned the booster off and vigorously closed onto the convoy vehicle. A mechanical sound resounded as he crushed asphalt by his landing.

The surroundings were silent, there was nobody else near the convoy vehicle.

There was no evidence of an enemy attack, it didn't seem likely that the accident was caused by that.

However, the Inquisitor that was supposed to escort it nor the driver could be found.

《"There is a reaction coming from the car."》

"...yeah."

While being embraced by a touch of uncertainty, Takeru manually opened the hatch of the convoy vehicle.

The inside was dim, it took him a few seconds for his eyes to get used to it.

It seemed like the Iron Maiden was already opened.

Takeru approached it fearfully.

"...Kiseki?"

He called out. At the same time, a sound of something wet came from under his feet.

He lowered his line of sight. Under his foot. Under his foot, there was a pool of blood. Starting from the place Takeru stepped into, it stirred.

Takeru looked up. His face was expressionless and stiff, he raised his head.

"————"

There, was something that was Kiseki.

His beloved sister was certainly there. Both her hands and feet were restrained in cross, she was wrapped in a copious amount of belts and chains, an exaggerated device was attached to hear head, and——there was a gaping hole in her chest, despite having a hole in her chest, it was certainly his little sister.

Through the empty hole the other side could be seen. Her limbs and head were connected only by skin.

Shedding blood, without stopping, seeing her life bleeding out Takeru has——

"——It can't be..."

He refused to accept it.

"Accept the reality."

A voice came from behind. Takeru didn't look back. He looked directly at Kiseki, and didn't turn around.

Kyouya held up the hatch with his right hand and chuckled while looking at Takeru.

"This was originally your everything, right?"

"————"

"If you did that at the very beginning, it would have all turned out better. No one would have died five years ago, and she wouldn't have had to kill anyone. She would die without making anyone unhappy."

"————"

"It's your fault that it turned out like this you know? It's because you protected her that I had to do it in your stead."

"——————"

"Be grateful to me, Onii-chan."

Momentarily, from the convoy vehicle two demons jumped out with a momentum like a cannonball.

Takeru was grasping Kyouya's head, below him, Kyouya was holding Takeru's neck.

While crushing the highway's asphalt, Takeru crushed Kyouya by injecting magic into his entire body. Allowing himself to reveal his anger for the first time, Takeru roared.

"KYOUYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

"It's your turn next! Kusanagiiii!"

Towards the head of Takeru who tried to crush him, Kyouya aimed the muzzle of his right hand.

Takeru leaped away from Kyouya the moment trigger was pulled.

Although the cannon's roar sounded beside his ear, the magical buckshot hasn't grazed him.

After rotating in the air, Takeru landed like a leopard. After immediately kicking off the ground, he rushed to Kyouya again.

"——Buckshot!"

The moment it was commanded, Kyouya's right hand which formed a gun let out a clunky sound.

The shotgun fired. From in front of Takeru, his left and right side, pieces of magic power have assaulted him.

"WUOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!"

Undaunted, Takeru twisted his body at low attitude during leap and plunged into the middle of buckshot's slugs. There was a small distance between multiple slugs. If shot from a distance like that, the buckshot naturally diffuses and scatters over a wide range. Takeru used the gap before it scattered to avoid.

However, it didn't end with a single shot. Two shots, three shots. Same shotgun fire continued to be released in front of him.

Getting hit inevitable, and so Takeru gave up on avoiding.

He received a slug in his shoulder and belly which caused his body to sway. His armor was peeled off, but even as he was being swung around, Takeru arrived in front of Kyouya with his sword. With an opponent using a shotgun, there was no better way to fight other than this. Of all the firearms, it had the worst compatibility with Soumatou.

Kyouya sank down and raised his gun barrel, when he was about to let out his fourth shot, Takeru's blade has finally arrived at him.

When his gun barrel released a shot, green particles splashed into the sky.

Immediately closing the distance, Takeru swung his sword down.

The nodachi has clashed with the huge gun. An azure armored knight and the dark green demon once again locked against each other.

Takeru faced towards Kyouya who had his eyes stained red and shouted while barring his fangs.

"Do you even understand what you did, Kyouya!"

"Hhahahaha it's just as you saw it! I've slaughtered your little sisterrr!!"

Kyouya laughed, it was as if he couldn't help but have fun during this fight.

"You seee! For a long time now I didn't like you! Despite being despised by people, you continued to laugh like an idiot! I've always knew it's just a disguise! You've always had something seething deep in your belly but wouldn't fucking spit it outttt... I knew you'll expose your real nature someday! I can finally see it, Kusanagi Takeru!"

"I don't care about what you think about me...! But Kiseki...! What has Kiseki done to you! Kiseki wasn't the one you had to take revenge against was she?!"

"That has nothing to do with it! I just despise all the heretics living in this world! I'll massacre all of them, that's all!"

The two Relic Eaters repelled each other, bringing destruction to the surrounding substances by releasing magic power all around. When it came to amount of magic released by Relic Eater's, Kyouya's Nero released an overwhelmingly higher amount.

Kyouya's eyes were bloodshot, blood vessels were visible on his face and even armor have pulsated.

This fighting spirit wasn't just thanks to his Witch Hunter Form. Much less, it was a reason for him to be able to follow Takeru's Soumatou.

It was some kind of body strengthening magic, it was abnormal no matter how he looked at it.

《"KYAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA! That's right my master! You just have to despise everything! I'll grant everything to you... let's fulfill your revenge together! Bam bam bam bam bam bam bam let's shoot, let's continue until it's all dyed white! Nero will grant it all, all of it to you!"》

A shrill voice echoed in his head. Nero, using Yoshimizu Akira's voice mocked Kyouya.

Takeru understood everything.

"It's you... you're the one who made Kyouya like that!"

《"That's what Master desired okay? Nero is just a machine granting his desires! My job is to instigate, fuel, rouse his heroism endlessly! His revenge is my reward after all!"》

The Relic Eater "Nero" used the desire for revenge in exchange for power. In order to receive passion from its contractor, as not to let that revenge be depleted it kept instigating them.

It reproduced the voice of his dear comrades, it reproduced the grief and chagrin of his dying comrades, it mimicked the appearance of his childhood friend who was always beside him.

And those who were lost, like a ghost of those people, Nero continued to whisper into his ears.

Come on, stand up. And have your revenge. It won't be tolerated like this. It's disappointing. Hey, captain—...my Kyouya. Bet all you have and take revenge for me.

《"KYAHHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"》

"...this isn't Yoshimizu! Yoshimizu wouldn't... your comrades wouldn't want something like this!"

"Don't talk about my comrades you fucker!"

Kyouya pushed back Takeru's sword with his gun barrel.

It looked like Kyouya far above him when it came to power after all.

"Don't misunderstand. I know well that this thing isn't Akira...! I accepted it despite knowing that!"

"......!!"

"Neither this guy nor Chairman are using mee! ——I am the one using theem!"

Kyouya deflected Takeru's sword and aimed the muzzle at his waist.

On the verge of the shot being released, Takeru jumped up and to the right.

**zrshh*——The shotgun scrapped his toe. Leaving the highway, he vigorously tread with his feet on the building right beside.

Right before his fall began——Takeru ran on the wall.

"Long barrel——Frag Shot!"

Kyouya instructed the Nero, and his right hand gun deformed loudly taking shape a long cylindrical barrel and shoot.

It wasn't slugs——it was a grenade.

《"Host, please continue running as you are."》

Hearing a warning from Lapis who judged it to be dangerous, Takeru continued to run on the wall.

The speed of the bullet Kyouya released wasn't great, however——the moment it hit the building, it caused a magical explosion similar to that of napalm. It wasn't just one shot, Kyouya predicted locations Takeru was running to on the wall and landed them accurately.

"Guuo——OOOO!!"

Even being fueled by the blasts, Takeru ran on the building. The walls were smashed, glass was scattered; the green blasts charred both Takeru's armor and skin.

Before Takeru reached the end of the building, he was swallowed by the rubble and flames.

"Hha! I'll aim for where you're going to be dropping down...!"

While aiming at the middle point of the building from which a cloud of smoke raised, Kyouya pulled the lever on his right arm once again.

"Slug shot."

After a moment of loading, Kyouya pressed down his right hand with his left one.

And waited. Clad in the green flames and smoke, Takeru's figure was falling from the building in tatters.

However,

"HAAAAAAAAAAaaaaa!!"

He appeared, but not dropping down, but leaping towards Kyouya.

Takeru tore up explosion, cut apart the flames. The azure armored knight jumped straight at Kyouya while holding an enormous greatsword.

Surprised Kyouya raised his gaze higher, and tried to take aim at Takeru and shoot.

Two shots. A magic bullet about a size of a human head approached Takeru while spinning violently.

"Wha——!"

The one astonished was Kyouya. The two bullets released by him were torn apart on the verge of reaching Takeru. Despite the fact they were magic bullets of ultra-high density, seeing them bisected surprised Kyouya.

It was Takeru's maximum speed. Soumatou's limit. While in mid-air, with intention to sacrifice all the muscles in his arm he swung the great sword to prevent the bullets from reaching.

The region near Takeru's right eye has lost its functionality because of the brain abuse, but there was no time to be bothered about that.

《"FM Booster, full throttle."》

Magic roared behind him as instructed by Lapis, and Takeru's figure closed on Kyouya all at once.

Kyouya couldn't move. He couldn't keep up with that speed of Takeru's.

Because he was using a long barrel, there was a moment of delay as he was aiming the muzzle at Takeru.

——I got you!

Takeru entered the range and already started to swing his sword.

I have no intention of killing him——but I'll at least take an arm!

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——"

Possible to use only when Soumatou is fully unleashed, in order to trigger the fastest among all skills possessed by Takeru, he put everything in. For Kiseki's sake, he was obsessed by the thought of not losing.

However, Kyouya's obsession not to lose was no inferior to his.

*pop**pop**pop**pop*...!

Blood vessels were running through Kyouya's body and swelled up to the brink of rupturing.

It should be speed impossible for anyone to catch up on. It was world of sonic speed.

Inside of it, Kyouya's body moved.

"Sawed off——"

Blood vessels on his temple burst, while blood moistened his eyeball, Kyouya's line of sight caught Takeru.

The long barrel disassembled in an instant from the root and was cut short. The muzzle aimed at Takeru's abdomen. Neither of them could stop. Both of them prepared themselves for the other's blow——

"——Yamata no Orochi!"

"——Buckshot!"

A shot was released.

In Takeru's abdomen a magic raised to its peak exploded.

Takeru put all the strength in his body into swinging the sword down.

That moment——the sword Takeru was holding disappeared.

Leaving him no time to act surprised, magic burst into Takeru's abdomen.

A roar sounded and Takeru's body was thrown into the building once again by the shock in his abdomen.

His ribs were crushed and he vomited blood after having his internal organs pierced.

While remaining in the building, Takeru moaned in pain.

However, there was no damage he assumed there would be. With that much power, his lower body and head should have been disconnected.

"......Lapis...y...ou...!"

《"I prioritized sustaining Host's life. I used the magic power the blade was constructed with and converted it into abdomen armor. I beg forgiveness."》

"...ngh..."

《"At that rate, Host would have been inevitably defeated."》

Lapis explained indifferently. Even if she didn't say it, he knew that. Nevertheless, he still couldn't forgive it. It was a fact that blood rushed to his head too much. If he were calm, he would have done it differently.

However, Kyouya hurt Kiseki——

"...it's no time to be doing this...! Lapis, how's Kiseki...?!"

《"Host, first give priority to Kirigaya Kyouya and Nero. Focus on the imminent threat."》

"...tch, even though there's no time...!"

《"Please do not worry. We have sustained severe damage——but the damage the opponent suffered was larger."》

For a moment, he didn't know what was she talking about. Takeru still hasn't delivered a single attack to Kyouya, so how the enemy could be wounded more severely?

Takeru checked on Kyouya's current status and couldn't believe what he saw.

He saw Kyouya's figure stumble while supporting the cannon on his right arm.

"Gah............geboh...ooee...!"

Kyouya was violently vomiting blood. Somehow, his entire body was bloody. All muscles and blood vessels in his body seemed to be ruptured.

"...what's...happening...?"

As Takeru muttered, Lapis answered coldly.

《"Nero's magic power's property is 『Poison』. That Relic Eater's intrinsic magic is to remove magic from witch's body through usage of poison, it's very efficient. However, Host is not a witch, against me and Host it's meaningless. Therefore——"》

Lapis continued with slight despise Towards Kyouya in her words.

《"In order to fight with Host on equal terms, the contractor was poured the 『Poison』 property into him temporarily raising his reflexes and physical abilities."》

Certainly, the pain Kyouya was suffering was abnormal. His face was deathly pale, his eyes fully engorged, his breathing unstable. Even during battle, he was like a drug addict.

《"Even if converted into medicine, poison is still poison. If one continues to use it, it'll turn out as you can see. It cannot be compared with Host's skill, it's just a mere pretense."》

Takeru fell silent.

A pretense... certainly, it might have been so, but it was impossible for him to laugh at Kyouya's obsession.

The reason for that was because even now, Kyouya was standing. He just stood and glared at him, his lips formed a smile and once again the muzzle——once again, has been turned towards him.

"——Triple thread...!"

The barrel changed shape into an enormous one. Nails appeared on Kyouya's heels and affixed him into the asphalt supporting him. The muzzle further separated into three and started to rotate round and round.

Standing there, was Kyouya's figure which looked as if it turned into a stationary battery.

"...not yet...it's not....over...!"

Takeru stood in spot, as if taking in some of Kyouya's spirit.

He could feel sympathy for him. He could understand him. He could relate to how he felt.

But he couldn't agree with Kyouya's thinking. Just because he was deprived of something important to him he despised all heresy, it was selfish.

Takeru denied Kyouya at full force.

"Lapis, let's finish this."

While Takeru remained there affixed to the wall Lapis made the blade appear, he held the handle and stabbed the sword's tip into the building's wall.

《"Yes. However, the amount of magic remaining is not too high."》

"For only once, can you create a huge sword?"

《"? If it's just that."》

"...match the timing. There's only one chance."

As if to look through Kyouya, Takeru squinted while remaining on the wall. Kyouya poured the leftover magic into the barrel.

Glittering dark green particles started overflowing and turned into something that could be truly called a mass of violence.

He aimed at Takeru, in order to blow his body into smithereens.

On the verge of the blow being released, Takeru cried out.

"——Now!!"

When he gave the order, the nodachi stabbed into the building turned huge and ruptured it. It's length was thirty meters. The blade entered the building and protruded from the other side.

"DORYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaa!!!"

Furthermore Takeru put all the strength he had into the huge sword stabbing in the building and ——swung it.

The building that was originally nearly destroyed by Kyouya's magic grenades tilted. The large sword loudly took down the building's pillars, and finally, the huge building was bisected.

The building lost its support from inside,

And inevitably——it fell over on Kyouya.

"?!——Dammit! GAAAAAAAAhhh!"

One step away from starting the bombardment, Kyouya looked away from Takeru and aimed the muzzle above him.

Aiming for the ultra weight that attacked him, he released all the power he had in his body.

The three shells splendidly crushed the building's wreckage.

But even after turning into debris, it didn't disappear.

Without a way out, Kyouya was buried under the rubble as he was.

"Haa... haa..."

Takeru disabled the magic booster and slowly landed on the highway.

The road looked terrible, the place the building has fell down on has caved in.

Barely maintaining its form, it was likely to completely collapse at any moment.

"It's over huh. I need to hurry up and find Kiseki... Lapis, do you know the vehicle's current location?!"

Takeru asked Lapis in a hurry, it was then.

——**Bagonn**

The wreckage of the building in front of him rose up with a strong momentum.

From beneath it, lifting rubble all covered in blood was Kyouya's figure.

"Ku...sa...nagiiiiii...!"

His right hand was completely bent, his left hand was also battered, his muscle torn and blood vessels ruptured.

What was in front him was the very limit of tremendous tenacity. Kyouya threw the rubble beside him and stood opposite of Takeru.

"Kyouya...! Stop this already! At this rate you'll die!"

"Sha...ddup...! If I wasn't prepared to die... I wouldn't be... able to do something like this...!"

The bent gun barrel was unreliable lifted and turned towards Takeru.

However, magic hasn't accumulated and the barrel fell sloppily.

《"...this is weird. Even among Relic Eaters, Nero's healing ability should be one of the highest. Aside from consumption of poison, he shouldn't have suffered that much injuries."》

It was unusual for Lapis to be wondering about something like that, another magic resonance rang out.

《"Caaa～ausee, Maste～er... I've told you haven't I. You should have abandoned that replica and devote the healing performance to yourself."》

Nero's voice sounded as if provoking Kyouya.

That probably meant Kyouya didn't have a healing performance at all right from the beginning.

"Shut up... you shitty gun! It's your fault for not putting up a decent fight so stop acting so full of yourself!"

《"Since it's the contract's condition I'm drinking too you know? Right from the beginning there was no room to spare for someone else though? In the first place, it's too late to prolong her life, it's a waste. Pointless, or rather, do you really think you can achieve your revenge with just this much?"》

"Don't ya get it when I tell you to shut up!?"

His figure yelling to his own gun made it seem like he was desperately trying to hide something.

Kyouya already had wounds all over his body. Takeru determined he was no longer a threat and approached him.

Although Kyouya he tried to swing his arm again, he just staggered.

Nero said 'that replica'.

And when she said 'prolong her life' Takeru opened his eyes widely, thinking 'it can't be'.

"...you, it can't be that you're using your healing ability on Yoshimizu..."

With revenge as a payment for Nero, Kyouya presented Yoshimizu Akira's life extension as condition for the contract, he made all heresy indiscriminately as subject of his revenge... in order to continue prolonging her life, he continued to feed it...

Seeing Takeru's facial expression, Kyouya clenched his teeth strongly enough for his back teeth to crack.

"Shut up... don't just make guesses by yourself... I'm just sacrificing myself for revenge, that's all!"

"...stop this already. If you continue contracting that Relic Eater any longer, your body will not hold out... I can understand wanting to save Yoshimizu. But——"

"———, shut the fuck upppppppppp!"

Kyouya shook his left arm in anger, Takeru immediately put a guard up, however.

From the side, a bullet which looked like a red stake pierced through Kyouya's arm.

Momentarily, with a sound of breaking glass Kyouya's Witch Hunter Form was released.

"...wha...t...?!"

As if losing the body support, he stepped back.

Takeru was familiar with that stake. There was no way he would forget. Just recently, he also received that blow.

After passing through the target object, it forces the Relic Eater to release.

It's user could be only one person.

"——Ootori!"

"Sorry, I'm late."

As Takeru called her name, Ouka landed on top of the rubble next to him.

"Saionji is on top of the building and has this guy on her aim... it's all right now."

Ouka put a hand on Takeru's shoulder and immediately aimed Vlad's muzzle at Kyouya.

Kyouya, with his entire body covered in wounds laughed as if he had a room to spare.

"...ku...fuhahahaha... all of you... what a joke..."

He spat out a curse while bleeding from his mouth.

"You'll regret this... not killing her here... all mankind will be put at disadvantage... remember this, you puppets who don't know anything...!"

Mouthing something cryptic, Kyouya staggered backwards and fell down. The squashed guardrail was his destination, since the road was running above the city, there was nothing beyond the rail.

Kyouya leaned his waist against the guardrail and bent backwards grandly.

"Kyouya!"

Takeru reached out to him in a hurry, but Kyouya refused his help and showed him middle finger.

"It ain't over... I will definitely kill you off...! Do your best and despair, Kusanagi...!"

He spat that out and fell down. After a few seconds, an empty sound of water splashing came from below.

"...there's a river below. Normally we would go save him first but... a Relic Eater contractor will survive."

While saying so, Ouka holstered Vlad. Something unbearable embraced Takeru's chest as he stared down at the location Kyouya fell to. If he was caught by the Relic Eater of revenge and yet still tried to fight to protect something, Takeru couldn't blame him.

Takeru thought that much and shook his head.

At the moment, there was something else that was the priority. He had to sort out his own problems.

"Let's hurry and confirm the little sister's safety. There's still a high possibility of combat against other EXE members. Let's use this opportunity to take her and go back to school."

"............"

"...? What is it?"

Seeing Takeru not reacting, she called out to him louder. Takeru strongly clenched his fist.

"Ootori... you shouldn't come. I'll do something about Kiseki."

"Don't be stupid. Two is better than one. That's what you said haven't you."

"............"

"...even if you refuse, I'll still come after you."

With a dissatisfied look, Ouka puffed her chest proudly.

Takeru strongly gripped Lapis' handle and turned a sharp gaze towards Ouka.

"............fine. But prepare yourself. Kiseki is no longer the Kiseki you know of."

"...what happened?"

"For now, I don't want you putting hand on her. Leave it to me."

Saying just that, Takeru moved over the rubble and started walking towards the convoy vehicle Kiseki was contained inside of.

Ouka too, followed him while embracing uncertainty.

On top of a building's roof, Usagi was looking down through a scope and monitoring the area around Takeru and Ouka, waiting for the next move.

《"Usagi, can you hear me?"》

"I hear you. There's no enemy figures in the surroundings... what happened? The road is all battered. Is this... all your doing Kusanagi...?"

《"...before that, listen well."》

She started to listen carefully to his serious voice.

《"You're absolutely not to come over here."》

"Why is that?"

《"No matter what. I want you to tell the same to Suginami and Mari. Take everyone... and run away from here."》

"Run away you say..."

《"I want you to listen to it, it's captain's order. Please, run away as far as possible."》

Being compelled like that, Usagi was troubled not knowing how to react. Certainly, Takeru held the captain's authority, and it was something important.

When Usagi was wondering whether she should comply with it. At that time, in the corner of her vision something jumped in.

"——W-what...is that?"

She looked through the scope and involuntarily raised a voice.

On the right edge of the highway. The convoy vehicle has slanted because of the building's collapse and squashed in an ugly manner——from within, it seemed like something strange was overflowing. It looked as if a red, deep red flower was blooming——

"Kusanagi...? Please respond! Kusanagi!"

She tried communicating with Kusanagi by screaming into the intercom, but he already switched his own off.

Mari who heard from Usagi about Takeru's order to run away jumped down from the passenger seat of the car operated by Ikaruga.

"Nikaido, where are you going."

Ikaruga called out to her from behind.

"It's obvious right! To where Takeru is!"

Mari just turned her neck around and yelled towards Ikaruga. In order to stop her, Ikaruga leaned out of the window.

"We can't do anything. We should do as Kusanagi said and get away from here."

"...I misjudged you Suginami! Despite all you said, I always thought you were the one thinking about Takeru the most!"

"That's not what I'm saying. We should leave everything to here, I——"

She spoke up until then, but Mari ignored it and started running.

Ikaruga spat out a sigh.

"Wait. Nikaido, how are you going to pass through the highway to get there?"

"Where, you ask. Of course the shortest possible route right. Every minute counts."

"That's fine, but on foot?"

"…………"

"In the first place, the shortest route there should be through highway, but you can't just fly there now. Unless you get there from the inlet, you won't get to Kusanagi you know?"

"…………"

"So, are you going to go on foot until you reach the inlet? I won't stop you any more, how about you start going there?"

The entrance to highway was five kilometers away.

Mari turned around to look behind her, then she came back silence and sat down on the car's passenger seat.

With a sullen expression, she looked away outside the window and supported her chin with a hand.

"…………"

"............"

"............"

"...〜〜〜!! Hurry up and spit it outtt!"

Her face bright red, Mari hit the dashboard.

Looking reluctant, Ikaruga started the engine.

"...even if we head there now, we'll only become a burden to him. He's worried about us, and he doesn't want to lose sight of what he should do..."

While staring far in the distance, Ikaruga put her foot on the accelerator.

Mari looked at her sideways, folded her arms and snorted.

"We won't become a burden to him. As if we would."

Just a little surprised, Ikaruga looked at Mari.

"Since we've been told to go back by Takeru, it means he's definitely shouldering some burden... just as he has done it with ours."

"............"

"I definitely won't him let shoulder anything else. This time we will be the ones shouldering Takeru's burden. He... made it so that I could properly choose."

Mari frowned and closed her lips tightly.

Ikaruga's hair swayed, and she stared into Mari's eyes who was beside her displaying her bravado.

"...scales have dropped from my eyes, I wonder if that's what it is? I thought Nikaido is more of a heroine type, but unexpectedly, are you the hero-type?"

"...what's that, what do you mean?"

"I wonder if it's Kusanagi's influence... how troubling."

The moment Mari saw Ikaruga slightly dissatisfied, she opened her eyes widely.

For just a moment, Ikaruga smiled. But when she blinked, Ikaruga's sleepy expression was already back on her face.

"Don't complain if you die. What's going to happen ahead of now, even I do not know."

"You think I would be shaken by what lies ahead? Let me tell you this, what you guys think about me, I think of everyone as——"

"Yes yes, comrades comrades. You too are a member of 35th Test Platoon〜 congrats miss dropout〜."

"Somehow what you're saying really pisses me off?!"

Ignoring Mari's outrage, Ikaruga stepped on the accelerator.

The two headed out, in order to help their comrade.

Kusanagi Kiseki——Hyakki Yakou's activation happened when there was a risk of her dying.

Her condition was similar to Overflow Complex. Just like magic overflowing from a damaged Phantom Instrument, Kiseki's power too was going wild if left alone.

When she was young, it was not much of a threat. Takeru's father used a box-shaped hut made of anti-magic material, he shouldered a large amount of debt so that he could repair it and confine her.

But that too, has reached the limit as Kiseki continued to grow.

Likewise, Inquisition's facility was unable to suppress her any longer.

Once it goes out of control, the demon body will continue granting Kiseki's wishes.

Kiseki hates the world. It hurts her, confines her, from the bottom of her heart she hates the world that refuses to acknowledge her existence.

And that is why, the demon power grants her this wish.

"...Kiseki..."

Standing on the ground, Takeru witnessed that sight.

He wasn't surprised. Although he wasn't familiar with it, he was prepared for it. Takeru knew right from the beginning that a simple hole in her body is not enough to kill her.

The surface around her has been eroded. Kiseki's body was said to be a crystallization of demon body cells, an aggregation of a special magic property. Once the demon power is unleashed, it will not stop until it devours everything.

The earth, the air, until she overruns all the living beings, it will not end.

The highway's surface, guardrails, even telephone poles, they have all become a part of Kiseki. The convoy vehicle was squashed from the inside, ruptured starting with the container and dyed red in response to the erosion just like a peony.

In the center, there was Kiseki.

"Ootori, watch it from here."

"...ngh, no can do. I won't let you go alone."

As expected, even Ouka was horrified by the sight in front of her.

It was obvious. Seeing such a foreign presence, it was her first time.

"It's all right. I alone, am safe. I'll speak with Kiseki... if Kiseki's power runs out of control any more than this, I'll somehow hold down the demon part of her."

"..........."

"Don't touch the red substance. Just by touching it... you will be incorporated in it. If you judge it to be impossible... run away as far as possible."

"But...!"

"It's an order."

He said so, and without looking at Ouka, Takeru proceeded.

The flower stood up as if trying to hide the center that was in the middle of convoy vehicle, in there stood Kiseki who distorted her face in pain of being restrained. The restraint on her head was leaking out flashes of lightning.

A Gleipnir made with the technology brought together and dedicated for Kiseki. Although wearing it barely suppressed the mutation of her body, it being destroyed was only a matter of time.

Takeru wore the complete Witch Hunter Form, and closed onto Kiseki at brisk pace.

"Kiseki... it's Nii-chan..."

As not to stimulate her, he put a hand on Kiseki's cheek.

Under Kiseki's feet, the demon's crystallization spread out like a skirt, a foreign red light shoot out from the horn extending from her forehead. It's shape was the same as five years ago.

After going this far, it was no longer impossible to put her into coma by using drugs.

If there was any possibility, it would be having Takeru speak with her.

The demon inside of Kiseki only showed signs of stability when Takeru was beside her, that's what Sougetsu said before.

Although it was impossible to hold it down completely... but if he touched her like this, there was a chance... that he could appease Kiseki's power.

Kiseki's face distorted in pain, and she opened her eyes wide.

Her eyes stained with red and looked like rubies saw Takeru.

"Onii-chan..."

His little sister cried weakly seeing her brother.

"I'm sorry... I can't hold it any more."

"...no such thing. I came, it's all right now."

Responding to Takeru's words, Kiseki shook her head.

"I can tell... even if Onii-chan is beside me... I can no longer stop."

"...Kiseki... look into my eyes, here, this way."

He held her cheeks with both his hands and faced her towards him.

While shedding tears, Takeru made a desperate smile.

"I will definitely protect you. That's why... you no longer need to despise anything."

"..........."

"I will definitely make a place for you to stay in this world. So that there will be no need for you to hate, I will change this world."

He had no basis for that. But the current Takeru was determined to change the world in order to stop Kiseki.

Takeru has been always thinking of what to do to save Kiseki. He met a lot of people, learned, obtained a human heart... for Kiseki, he continued to proceed in order to become the best older brother there is.

It might have been slow, but Takeru found comrades.

Ones carrying the same burden, he found comrades.

That why surely, there was nothing impossible.

I will definitely save you. He held out those feelings and displayed them to Kiseki.

"............nn......"

However, Kiseki downcast her eyes and shed tears of pain.

"...stop...don't show...it to Onii-chan..."

Gasping in pain, she muttered.

She had no intention of saying it towards Takeru, he didn't notice that she was directing it to her power.

Takeru's feet, was surrounded crystallization of the demons before he realized.

"Stoop... d-don't show him such... filthy memory...!"

The variant swelled up along with Kiseki's lament and wrapped around Takeru.

Unable to resist, Takeru closed his eyes inside of the variant.

However, it was strange.

The variant which wrapped around him had no intention to kill him. No intention of eroding him.

From the portion that touched him, something has been passed onto him. At first there was sadness, then there was an unbearable pain. And in the end——a memory has flowed into him.

* * *

It was a memory of the past. A memory from the box. Kiseki's memory. In front of her, there was the harsh appearance of her father.

Her father swung a sword along with an apology, the memory of... Kiseki being beheaded.

The power resuscitated Kiseki's body in an instant and pounced on her father.

『"Kusanagi Double-Edged style, Heavenly Evil Spirit"』

Her father used the swordsmanship passed down the generations of Kusanagi household and slaughtered the power of demons.

Despite being scratched up, despite being close to dying, without shedding a single tear, time and time again. Those fights continued until morning, and they repeated until the day Kiseki killed her father.

A blackout. The memory which flowed next was that of her being in Inquisition's facilities.

Her body was bound, her eyes were wandering without shedding a single tear.

——Where is this place...? I'm scaredd.

Kiseki's feelings flowed. Watching her from the ceiling was a device akin to a surveillance camera. What was different from camera, was the fact that it had a something which seemed like a barrel attached to it.

——No! I don't want to die!

At the same time as she screamed, bullet was fired from the device.

A tremendous pain assaulted her, her consciousness has been interrupted.

Blackout. When she woke up, a wall was approaching her from the front.

——Uu...nooo...help meee...

The wall approached her slowly.

Kiseki screamed in horror as it drew near, and it slowly crushed her.

Blackout. When she woke up, from the sprinklers on the ceiling a rain of sulfuric acid poured down and dissolved her skin.

——...sav...e me...Onii...ch...

In the middle of pain which continued forever, Kiseki called her brother.

Blackout. When she woke up, flames wrapped around her body.

Blackout. When she woke up, the teeth of multiple saws chopped her body up.

Blackout. When she woke up, multiple tubes connected to her body drew out all the blood from her body.

Blackout. Blackout. Blackout.

Blackout. Blackout.

Blackout.

Kiseki opened her eyes. In the deep darkness she couldn't feel anything, a single wish was conceived inside of her chest.

Ever since she's been continued to be killed by her father, she always held it in the corner of her heart.

But she could no longer stand it. Kiseki let her wish be heard.

——A world like this should just perish.

Before long, Kiseki's power began to try fulfilling her wish.

However, every time she sincerely hoped for that, her brother's face appeared in her head.

His smile and his words appeared in her head.

『"I will definitely protect you."』 『"I will definitely save you."』 『"I will definitely make it so that you'll be able to live normal life."』 『"I will definitely show how I change the world."』

Those words she heard many times, she believed in them. Believed and believed and believing, she continued to wait.

But her brother didn't come to save her. Once, she wished to be killed by her brother. However, when she was taken in by Inquisition, she hoped that they'll be able to hold her power down. The result was her being killed every day just like she was killed by her father, it was terrible. And thus, it led her to hold this wish.

——...kill me. I want to be killed by Onii-chan.

What lied ahead of her, was only death by the hand of her brother's.

In order to fulfill this wish of Kiseki's, the demon power flapped its wings and took her outside.

* * *

"...AAa...aa..aaa..."

The red meat wrapping around Takeru's body moved away and his gaze started wandering in shock.

"...AAA...AA..."

Kiseki's memories that flowed inside of him showed something unimaginable to Takeru. Was he qualified to cry out?

The answer was obvious. No. Not knowing can't be an excuse. This was something he should have known earlier.

He should have thought better about what it takes to hold down Kiseki's power. Her demon power was something similar to Overflow Complex, if it reached the limit, it started flooding out despite intention of the person herself. There was a need of allowing it leak outside on regular basis. Kiseki wouldn't release it by her own will.

Then what to do in that case?

Just grant her death.

It was the quickest way to draw out the demon power.

If I just thought about it a little... I would realize... and yet... I...

He despaired at himself for spending time not knowing anything.

What 'I'll continue visiting you' damn it. What 'I'll definitely protect you', damn it.

What family. What big brother. I'm not qualified to say such thing.

Letting her hear about his own school life, not knowing how was Kiseki suffering, he acted carefree...

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!!!!"

He held his head, fell on his knees and screamed.

Kiseki who was bowing down looked up. Her tired face smiled weakly.

"See...Kiseki did her best...really really...did her best...?"

Towards Takeru who tortured himself and had whose eyes were flooded with tears, Kiseki said.

"That's why...it's enough already...right...?"

Hearing her wish, Takeru stopped wailing.

Even without her saying it, he understood her wish. Takeru looked up with his eyes wet from tears.

"...Kiseki...!"

He reached out. Putting in all the atonement there was in him.

Putting in all the feelings he had of being unable to save her.

He reached out to Kiseki's cheek.

"Target acquired——Lævateinn, partial release."

Takeru's didn't have in his heart to hurt the surprise attacker coming from the sky.

Directly from above, the surprise attacker appeared while rotating and landed a blow to Takeru's head. After eating a hit to the head, Takeru's body was blown away and rammed into the debris fifty meters away on the highway.

The attacker was a girl wearing a full body suit and a helmet covering her face. After confirming where the blown-away Takeru landed she housed the huge double-handed sword in the sheath.

"Kusanagi——!"

Ouka who was in daze hearing Takeru's scream rushed to repel the attacker.

She immediately turned the muzzle to the girl in body suit.

The girl too, held the handle of the sword on her back once again and made a posture to fight back.

"You bastard...!"

"...another Relic Eater. Forgive me Orochi. There are signs of the capture target going berserk. In order to avoid prolonging combat, I'll pull out the Lævateinn again."

"What gibberish are saying...! Do you understand what did you just do?!"

Leaving everything to anger, Ouka placed a finger on the trigger. The girl tilted her neck.

"I do. You will die. And I will complete the mission."

"...prepare yourself, Valhalla!"

Ouka's murderous intent exploded, the battle was about to truly begin.

That moment, the variant whose movement has been suspended has stirred.

Both Ouka and the girl noticed the anomaly, and moved their line of sight to Kiseki.

Kiseki suddenly lost the happiness that was right in front of her and held her head stunned.

"O...Onii-chan? Where? Onii-chan?"

Shivering from cold and loneliness, Kiseki's teeth chattered.

"He died...Onii-chan has...left Kiseki...and died on his own..."

Convinced that her brother has died, Kiseki shook her head scattering tears.

Perceiving the danger, Ouka tried to speak to Kiseki.

——But.

"Uu...waa...uuuwaAAaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

She didn't make it in time, from inside of Kiseki——demons overflowed.

The Gleipnir on her head that was suppressing the power violently leaked out electricity, let out smoke and fractured.

Kusanagi Kiseki's power was completely released. The crystallization of demons overflowed and streamed on the highway like an explosive tsunami, spreading without stopping.

"——! I was too late!"

"That's...!"

The girl in body suit leaped from the spot and took distance from Kiseki.

Ouka wanted to stop Kiseki somehow, but she immediately realized that her words won't reach her.

The girl's figure was no longer there. While biting her lips, Ouka too has disengaged herself from Kiseki.

"NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!"

Kiseki's screams continued.

The variant wriggled as she screamed, the multiple mouths raised the same scream.

Unending lamentation spread throughout the city along with the crystallization of demons.

The variant has plunged into the town. Those who aimed for shelters were swallowed by the red tsunami approaching from behind before they could even raise a scream.

Members of the Spriggan and Dragoons rushed urgently to intercept it, but it was in vain.

The variant tsunami approached mercilessly and there was no way to oppose it.

People, buildings, ground, all material has been swallowed.

As it crept, the city was becoming part of Kiseki.

Ouka who moved away from Kiseki dexterously jumped on top of the rubble to where Takeru was.

The variant flowed out momentarily and spread, it immediately eliminated the scaffolding.

Moreover, tentacles formed which tried multiple times to swallow Ouka.

"Kuhh!"

Even when she intercepted it with Vlad, she could only kill one part of it.

A variant tried to stab her after taking a form of a needle, Ouka managed to avoid it in the very last moment.

"Kusanagi!"

She could see Takeru's figure. He was thrown into the rubble of a building's wall and fainted.

Of course, around him too, the variant has begun to flock.

"T-this thing!!"

Ouka concentrated and triggered Vlad's intrinsic magic in exchange for blood.

A crimson magical circle appeared under her feet, and Ouka shouted the magic name.

"《Tepes Rain》!"

Aiming to the sky with the gun in her right hand, and aiming to the ground with the gun in her left, she fired.

Along with unique gunshot, huge piles poured down from the sky and grown vigorously from the ground. The variant surrounding Takeru and herself faded away, screaming.

It was only makeshift solution. Ouka used the opportunity and rushed over to Takeru.

"Kusanagi! You okay?!"

There was no reply. In his half-opened eyes, pupils couldn't be seen.

Blood was coming out of his head. To have been dealt this much damage despite being in Witch Hunt form, it must have been a considerably strong blow. Mistilteinn would perform treatment, but an injury to the head was time-consuming. As for brain damage, it was impossible for a Relic Eater to restore it.

Ouka admonished herself for not noticing the surprise attack, and hung Takeru's arm on her shoulders.

When she decided to withdraw and raised her face... she witnessed the despair.

"............th..at's..."

The city... spreading in front of her was sight of entire city turning into red meat.

It was as if the entire groups of buildings were sinking into a swamp, they tilted and were buried in the red wriggling meat, cars, telephone poles, everything was eventually swallowed and deformed in the same way.

It seemed like she was looking at a nightmare.

As if to oppose the threat, she clenched her teeth and poised the Vlad with one hand.

Momentarily, the variant crawling on the ground jumped and attacked Ouka like a wave.

Ouka didn't give up. She tried to struggle until the end in order to protect Takeru.

"Ootori——!"

A voice called her from behind.

A gunshot and a fierce sound of wind echoed. Five bullets fired from behind her blew away the variant which tried to swallow her and saved her in the nick of time.

After suddenly braking, a car stopped in front of Ouka.

From inside of the car parked in front of Ouka who tried to hold back the waves of variant came out Mari and Ikaruga, and Usagi who was been sniping from above came jumping down.

The three enclosed Takeru and Ouka to protect them.

"You guys——why did you come when you were told to run away!"

"Shaddup, because we were bored!"

Usagi said so not wanting to have a bothersome quarrel and shot the variant with an anti-material rifle.

"Telling us to run away and abandon you is unreasonable right?! Don't act so high and mighty when you're in a pinch!"

Mari put both of her hands on the ground and triggered magic.

"《Aurora Shield》!"

A magical circle appeared enclosing around her comrades, it wrapped around all the members like a barrier film.

Ouka spat out a sigh with irritation and laid Takeru down on the ground.

And, holding the gun in the same was as her comrades she started to fire.

"...to think Suginami has come as well. I thought you were more composed."

"Don't just measure me by yourself. Even I am not that mature."

"But even if you come, you're useless aren't you."

"I was driving the car?"

"We're already being swallowed! We can't escape like this!"

"The road behind has already been swallowed... we can't escape with the car, it's a huge pinch."

Although she said it indifferently, Ikaruga downcast her eyes as she looked at the variant.

"...so this is the little sister's power. I've heard about it, but I didn't think it was this atrocious."

"So you heard about it from Kusanagi after all..."

"Oh, jealous at a time like this? Aren't you relaxed."

"Stop mocking. If there's something else to know, say it. Somehow, we need to stop that girl...!"

While shooting with Vlad, Ouka waited for Ikaruga's reply.

Ikaruga looked at the middle of variant, at wailing Kiseki's figure and shook her head.

"...to suppress it, we can only continue to kill that girl's overflowing and going out of control power until she snaps out of it. Only her main body is immortal, so the parts leaking out can be killed."

"...continue this? How long?"

"I don't know. Perhaps a few hours, maybe a few days... or maybe it will continue endlessly until the world perishes."

Without looking at Ouka who was at loss for words, Ikaruga closed her eyes.

"The device does react to it right... the substance spilling out gives off the same reaction as magic. Apparently, the things that are eroded by it's touch are being converted into the same substance."

"...in other words..."

"It increases as much as it erodes. Depleting it is difficult. If you want to temporarily deplete the content in that girl's body, then you need to kill it faster than it continues to erode."

The situation was hopeless.

"Fortunately, anti-magic material slows the progress of erosion, but it's only a matter of time. How long will the city's partition walls hold out... if they're breached, it could spread to entire world."

"..........."

"Killing the person herself is impossible... as long as she doesn't wish for death from others, the power will continue to reject death. If there's anything that could possibly kill her..."

As Ikaruga spoke, Ouka moved her neck and looked at Takeru.

Mistilteinn has probably healed his wounds already, he just had his eyes closed as if sleeping.

"——ngh, let's destroy as much as possible! If EXE's reinforcements come it's still possible to do it!"

Trying to shake off the thought, she started rapid fire from Vlad towards the variant.

Usagi too, was shooting with her rifle. Mari devoted herself to defense.

All of them were aware that they were stuck in the current state.

The highway was being looked at by a figure standing on the roof of a building, far far away.

A man with shining white hair fluttering in the wind, Ootori Sougetsu had seen everything.

"...Kirigaya-kun did something really interesting. Even though he was told she was dangerous so many times, he still tried to kill her, he truly has a heart that indiscriminately looks for revenge on everyone. Well, I don't hate that."

While placing a hand on his chin, the man who could be called the ringleader behind it all looked at the street buried in the red meat.

Probably accompanying him, a figure approached from behind taking loud footsteps.

That person was a tall woman clothed in conflicting black lab coat.

Her cloudy gray hair shook, on her face she had a smile which could be called a lump of curiosity.

Hearing the footsteps Sougetsu sighed, and beckoned her to come over with his back turned.

"...it has unfolded just as you requested it. Alchemist's representative director, Suginami Suzaku-san."

Called over, the woman called Suzaku moved right beside Sougetsu at brisk pace all excited. Her belly hit the railing with a strong momentum and she leaned forward.

Her eyes were shining like that of a child, and Suzaku rejoiced at the sight of red meat swallowing the city.

"——Ahha♪ how nice, really nice! What's that, to think such a living being exists?! Wonderful!"

She seemed thrilled and started wiggling her body with a blush on her cheeks.

"That thing's nice! Chairman Ootori! Can that be replicated?!"

Sougetsu looked at her as if looking at a snob and shook his head unnaturally at the city's devastation.

"It's impossible. Even if the genes are collected and a replica is made, the characteristics won't dwell inside of it. Because it's a curse allegedly cast by ancient Onmyouji, it cannot be replicated by neither science nor alchemy."

"Is that is how it is? Whaat a shaame, it seems like it would be fun if there were a lot of those."

"We're suffering large amounts of damage on our side. Because you said 『I want to see Kusanagi Kiseki's power』, so I satisfied your curiosity at expanse of a single section. Concealing that fact is tough too."

"Ara ara, so it's a bet where you will have to take responsibility if you lose? Putting that green boy as part of the Hyakki Yakou's escort, acting all frantic... the one who it proposed was you."

Ufu, Suzaku twisted her waist and faced him with a cat-like expression.

Sougetsu showed no interest and snorted.

"In exchange for conceding the total control over Kusanagi Kiseki's research you will stop providing technology to Valhalla, immediately stop trading and become a company doing business exclusively with Inquisition. I'll have you keep your promise."

"Of course. This Suzaku will create, and create, and continue creating for your sake♪."

She hid one of her hands behind her waist and cutely saluted, annoyed by Sougetsu remaining expressionless she continued.

"We will cooperate with the clean up this time. If we use the latest weapons, we should be able to destroy the erosion if it's limited to just this section. We have already finished preparations so be at ease♪."

"...no, as for the clean up, it's possible that assistance won't be necessary."

"What does that mean?"

Once again looking curious, Suzaku leaned out and stuck out her face to him.

Sougetsu pushed Suzaku back, and raised up his long white hair.

"We'll see if it'll be carried out well... it's much faster than expected, but it's not bad considering the circumstances. The problem is which side it will roll over to afterwards."

"? What are you talking about?"

"About our ultimate weapon."

Sougetsu smiled and turned around to Suzaku.

"President, how about making another bet with me?"

This time, it was him who started the negotiations.

Suzaku stopped acting as if she was underestimating him and explored his expression.

He lightly opened his eyes and smiled like a Cheshire cat. Suzaku knew well that Sougetsu is more dreadful than anything else when he makes that smile.

"Will Kusanagi Takeru kill his little sister, or not... let's bet on that."

The corners of his mouth distorted and overlapped with the crescent moon behind him, at the same time a power outage happened in the city.

Usagi and Ouka stood back to back and while following up one after another they showered the outside of the barrier with storm of projectiles.

"I have no more bullets! Ootori, please lend me a gun!"

"My hands are busy! Take it out of the holster!"

"Roger!"

Just as she was told to, Usagi pulled out two pistols from the holsters on Ouka's waist, looked back immediately and started shooting.

Although their cooperation was perfect, on top of running out of bullets, the power of Vlad's stakes was clearly going down.

Ouka's breath turned rough and her complexion paled. She didn't have enough blood. Using intrinsic magic has been a considerable burden on her.

And on top of that,

"............kuh!!"

Mari's defensive barrier gradually narrowed its range.

Because she's been restrained by Gleipnir, her inability to use everything was leading to catastrophe. Although she repeatedly built operative procedure in order to improve the efficiency of magic power's circulation as much as it was possible, the operative procedure was disturbed every time the variant tried to destroy the barrier. Those were not simple attacks, the variant had without doubt special effect. It was possible for it to erode even magic.

"No good... I can no longer maintain the barrier...! Takeru... please wake up...!"

Mari continued to appeal to Takeru.

To run away or do something, they needed Takeru's power. Although she vowed not to be a burden to him, having to rely on Takeru in the end made Mari feel worthless.

If this goes on, everyone will fall together.

"Come onn!! If not for this collar I could protect everyone alone...!"

Feeling like crying, yelled out in frustration.

The variant was approaching. Ouka and Usagi couldn't keep up with intercepting it. Some of the variants hardened and sharpened, again and again piercing through the barrier.

Every time the variant touched it, the barrier was peeled away.

"...damn...it...!"

She tried to persist somehow, but it was her limit.

The enemy broke through the barrier, thinking it's already over Mari tried to use attack magic in a suicide attack to protect her comrades.

Just before that, Ikaruga who has finished treating Takeru's injuries and put him down, has swallowed something that seemed like white ore.

"Conversion material input, assumed mutation shape, barrier. Forceful rewriting process complete——execute."

After chanting; reciting words at high speed, Ikaruga pounded into the ground with the palm of her hand.

The asphalt on the ground suddenly started undulating, it's color changed from black to white. Following that, it changed shape as to protect the comrades and prevented the variant's tentacles attack in the nick of time.

Not knowing what happened, the three people other than Ikaruga were astonished.

"What... is this?"

"...Weiss Crystal? M-magic? But, a magic changing asphalt into Weiss Crystal is..."

Usagi and Mari stared in daze at the clear white wall surrounding them.

Ouka knitted her eyebrows and looked at Ikaruga.

"...spare me the questions now please. When we're out of danger, I'll tell you everything."

After hearing Ikaruga promise that, Ouka swallowed the question she was about to ask.

Ikaruga has soundly hit the wall she herself has built.

"Just as you guessed, it's Weiss Crystal. It's the ore with the best anti-magical effect there is... but its strength is too imperfect. Since there are impurities mixed in, it cannot demonstrate the anti-magic effect of a real gemstone."

"............how long can it withstand this?"

"...even if I make a long-winded estimate, maybe five minutes... by then, we need to decide what to do."

As Ikaruga said that, everyone fell silent.

They looked down, and although they considered a solution, they didn't have bullets remaining to let them either fight or escape.

Takeru was unconscious. According to Ikaruga's diagnosis, his head has received quite a lot of damage and it was unknown when exactly will he wake up. Mistilteinn was still being held by Takeru but there was no reaction from it at all.

"…………"

Ouka looked up at the sky and narrowed her eyes bitterly.

The situation, was hopeless. At this rate they would be all swallowed up by Kiseki, the reinforcements from EXE were also unlikely to come.

Possibly, they believe they would be wiped out if they were to be swallowed up by the variant.

In the distress like wide and distant seas Ouka stared at the gaping open space, and grit her back teeth.

There was only one way to break through in this situation.

For Takeru to… kill Kiseki.

For an older brother to kill his little sister. With that, everyone would be saved.

"…………that's the only thing…………"

With a hoarse voice, Ouka muttered towards the heavens.

What passed through her head, was the trauma from her past. Despite not wanting to kill, she was forced to kill… despair she didn't want to remember. Thinking of the moment she killed her little sister made her feel sense of emptiness strong enough to make her unable to breathe.

The warmth of her little sister reverberated through her hands which were wet with her little sister's blood.

The life she had been entrusted with by her father and mother had been robbed by her own hands, leaving only her behind.

The day her family was killed, was peaceful as any other. It was the same living room, they looked at the TV as usual, and they planned to go for a family picnic tomorrow. For the first time… they were supposed to go out together as family.

At that time, next to the corpses of her family, she saw an illusion of her family's gathering.

I want to be there, she reached out to the illusion, but the illusion has suddenly disappeared like smoke.

Only reality was left in front of her. The clean living room has turned into sea of blood and there were incredibly cold bodies of the ones she loved.

Even though she called her father and mother, their usual smiles wouldn't come back. Even though she called the name of her little sister, she didn't hear her voice calling her 'onee-chan' in response.

It was all over, the morning has descended, but no matter how long she waited the nightmare wouldn't pass.

——Can I let Takeru feel something like that?

——Can I use my comrades, and civilians lives as a reason to kill his beloved little sister?

——Can I do this to the benefactor who has saved me from the brink of despair?

"That's the only thing——I won't let happen!!!!"

Ouka bent her knees and kicked off the ground, she landed on the edge of the wall constructed by Ikaruga.

"Ootori?! What are you doing?!"

"You, what do you intend to do?!"

Mari and Usagi questioned her, and Ouka answered with her back turned to them.

"I will drive off as much of the variant as possible until the support arrives. If that happens, It'll all turn out well."

Hearing Ouka's words, Mari thought of those words as absurd and tried to stop her.

However, with the strength that remained in her, she thought of something and took a deep breath.

"Nikaido Mari."

She called Mari.

"I leave those two, and Kusanagi to you."

To that request, Mari opened her eyes wide and was too disturbed to even reply.

Ouka quietly crossed the guns in front of her chest.

"...Vlad, can you hear me."

She called the product of magic she owned.

《"...what is it, my provisional Master."》

As always, a solemn voice responded her.

It was the exchange they repeated many times over. She only asked Vlad bare minimum of questions, and without accepting she only let him drink blood.

And that too, has ended today. Ouka looked up.

"——Contract with me."

She could hear her comrades take breath.

《"...ohh, is that fine?"》

"...I don't mind."

《"'Thou art contracting for more than revenge art thou not? Have you not said thou won't accept any more before meeting the perpetrator?"》

As if to provoke her, Vlad laughed. Ouka closed her eyes silently.

"It's all right already. I realized, that this is the time during which I should use this power."

《"............"》

"I have no intention of stopping to fight in order to dispel the chagrin and despair of my family."

Ouka's blue eyes were harboring a flame and opened wide.

"However——if those living together with me are in a crisis, I will bet everything and fight! I am willing to accept you!"

Releasing the cross, Ouka greatly stretched out both of her hands.

Vlad listened to Ouka's words, and instead of laughing, responded with a serious voice.

《"If you want to change the pledge from a silly sideshow like revenge, I thought of drinking everything until I leave thou dry but... it did sound quite noble. It has resounded within me well."》

Vlad spoke with an exalted tone.

《"Very well, it's a contract! I shalt give thee everything. As consideration, entertain me well."》

Vlad's barrels started shining, and a crimson magical circle appeared under Ouka's feet.

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"

The words of power she spoke countless times shook the air surrounding her with a much greater force.

"——Malleus Maleficarum!"

That moment, particles of blood-red magic enveloped Ouka's body.

Her sunset-colored hair was bristled. Blood overflowed, sewing her armor.

The existence called Ootori Ouka has been completed and stood there.

《Calamity》

Worthy of the name, the crimson demon of domination.

Vlad was no longer in the shape of a gun. It was fused directly into her arms, her upper arms had huge piles created from magic growing from it. On top of the armor her body was clad in, there was a crimson cloak.

That appearance, was reminiscent of the legendary king of vampires.

Sweeping the cloak away, Ouka crossed her arms.

"I'll protect them. My comrades, Kusanagi, and his little sister too...!"

The piles protruding from her upper arm vigorously slid to the vicinity of her elbow and released steam.

In the middle of the steam's howl, Ouka's bright blue eyes were directed towards the variant.

Chapter 6 - Power of the God-slayer

Inside the darkness, Takeru continued to keep his eyes closed.

His intention to wake up and intention wanting everything to end clashed against each other, then he recalled what on earth was he there for.

In the end, just what did he come to do in there?

He wanted his little sister to live. No matter how painful it was, he wanted her to grasp happiness some day. He believed that even if Kiseki's existence is a sin, in her very self there was no sin.

Despite knowing it was just his ego, Takeru swore to make it happen.

He related himself with people, learned about them and even though he managed to grow, just the conclusion itself hasn't changed.

However, his ego could only remain as it was. Not knowing that Kiseki was placed in circumstances worse than death, the reason he blurted out things about protecting her was nothing else but that ego of his.

Five years prior, he was the main culprit, unable to do anything. At that time, he neither protected her nor killed her, if he didn't choose to run away, everything might have turned out different.

"Even now, it is not too late."

A voice rang out and he looked up.

Before he realized, the location has changed.

A devastated land had spread. Surely, it was not his world but a different one. In the sky floated a broken moon in three pieces. Far in the distance, something like a palace could be seen, but the palace too has been miserably decayed and the debris from its collapse floated in the air.

In this world that should have been beautiful, the time has stopped at the moment of destruction.

This world has ended a long time ago.

Takeru stood in the world that has ended and found the only existence that had colors other than himself.

In a location a slight distance away, alone, stood the azure-colored girl.

"...if you wish for it, I will grant you power."

Expressionlessly, the girl spoke to Takeru.

She softly snuggled up to his side and put a hand on Takeru's chest.

"I will only fulfill your wish. There is no need for you to reject me."

The azure girl said something deeply meaningful.

Mysteriously, Takeru understood the meaning of these words.

The girl stretched out her hands to Takeru's cheeks and wrapped it with both of them.

Seeking to comfort his heart, he knelt down on the ground powerlessly.

Looking up at him from below, the girl stared at Takeru and stroked his cheek.

"I am your beloved sword. You are my beloved master."

"…………"

"I will offer you everything. I will offer you all of my original power."

"…………"

"That's why, in consideration of that——"

"——Please give me your everything."

The girl moved her lips, and the questions of the contract had started once again.

—— Question number three. For the sake of your own goal, will you discard yourself? ——

Takeru didn't answer. Because even without an answer, she knew everything.

—— Question number four. For the sake of your goal, will you discard what you hold dear? ——

The girl's marble-like pupils right in front of him began to emit a faint glow.

Those were the same questions she asked once before. However, only the last question was different.

—— The last question.

—— For the sake of your goal, will you discard humans,

—— And seek me?

Takeru closed his mouth. Inside of his head, memories revived and were played all at once.

Encounter with his little sister, separation. Swordsmanship training in order to obtain Soumatou from his mentor. Every day during which he hated Inquisition for confining Kiseki. The suffering his little sister felt every day.

In the end, sound of peaceful laughter, he could see the door of the platoon's room.

Glimpsing into what Takeru desired, the girl closed her eyes in silence.

"...that is your wish, isn't it...?"

The girl's lips overlapped with Takeru's.

At the same time, his world has burst out.

He felt his own existence become ambiguous. Takeru was assaulted by the comfort which tempted him to leave his body to it.

Once again, Takeru closed his eyes.

《"—— Soul of the puppet “Kusanagi Takeru” seized.

—— Triggering operative procedure.

—— Injecting magic, starting the soul's erosion.

—— Time required for construction process, unknown.

—— Fusion continues. From this moment onward, Mistilteinn leaves Inquisition's control.

——『God Hunter』 start-up."》

《"Wake up——it's time for god-slaying."》

In response to the monotone voice, I, have opened my eyes.

* * *

Ouka leaped down from the wall, at the time of landing, she released killing intent.

"HAAAAAAAaaaaaaaa!!"

She raised a cry and swung her arm grandly.

Magical circles emerged at the stakes near her elbow, there was a sound of something charging, and the stakes were dyed in even deeper crimson red color.

"——《Count's Fang》!"

As if trying to punch them, she emitted the crimson stakes towards group of variants has flocked with her comrades as their target.

At the moment of release, enormous piles struck the variants invading the ground.

From the rubble and the eroded buildings to the road's wreckage, involving all of it, the released enormous piles penetrated through everything.

They had an extraordinary power, although it's range had only a total of hundred meters, with only a single attack the damage was spread around as if it has undergone bombing.

The main magical weapon《Count's Fang》 was something that specialized in penetration power and destruction. It was possible to add a magic-penetrating characteristic of Vlad to it, moreover, absorption of living being's blood and converting it into magical power was possible. It was something that excelled both in might and capability.

However, just after shooting it once the recoil has blown Ouka's body was backwards a considerable distance and hit the rubble. Originally, Vlad's stakes already had a strong recoil which could crush her arms if not for the body strengthening.

《"Be careful. My fangs have strong recoil and long reload times. 'tis fine to use the gun form."》

As she was told that, she spread her arms and the stakes sticking to her arms turned into particles, the particles reconstructed itself in Ouka's arms in the form of guns.

"——We're leaping!"

《"Permitted."》

She lowered her waist and kicked off the ground strongly. Witch Hunter Form's strength and Vlad's FM Booster send Ouka soaring far in the sky.

By spraying out magic from gaps in the Vlad's armor, Ouka stopped in mid-air.

She poised her gun towards the variants on the ground.

A bombardment of stakes has begun.

It was akin to a meteor shower crashing down. The infesting variants were sent bursting with the impact point as the center, and they sprinkled pieces of meat around.

She kept shooting single-mindedly. If she kills all of it, Takeru won't have to kill Kiseki, and her comrades could be rescued as well.

"There's no reason to hesitate...!"

Ouka continued the bombing without rest. Her Witch Hunt form's arm was hot, even as pain ran through it, she roared not bothered by it.

《"——There are signs of enemy above the ground. Multiple objects are approaching."》

"?! Valhalla?"

《"No, a part of the heretic."》

Looking in their direction, she noticed a number of varying red objects approaching from the ground by flapping their wings.

After looking closely, it seemed like they were parts of the variant released by Kiseki. Mouths and noses were clinging nonsensically to the spherical bodies, moreover, they were growing nonsensically-shaped wings.

The group of objects approached, surrounding Ouka and opened their distorted mouths.

『"Sunset-colored hair."』

『"Hate."』

『"The person who took Onii-chan away."』

『"Enemy."』

『"The person who wants to steal Onii-chan."』

『"Make her disappear."』

『"Don't take him away."』

『"Perish."』

『"Don't touch Onii-chan!"』

『"Onii-chan is mine! The only one who stay beside Onii-chan is Kiseki!"』

Using Kiseki's voice, the variants showered Ouka with jeers from their multiple mouths.

Ouka saw Kiseki crouch in the distance.

"STO-OOPpp! Kiseki didn't think that...! Don't... grant ittt...!"

Probably regaining her sanity, Kiseki tried to hold down the power.

『"Onii-chan promised."』

『"That he will die together with Kiseki."』

『"So don't get in our way."』

『"You're not needed here."』

『"Onii-chan doesn't need you."』

The variant ignored Kiseki's attempts to suppress it and exposed her real feelings she was keeping to herself.

Furthermore, it obscured Kiseki's figure, wrapping around her and whirling.

Ouka succumbed to the feelings tightening her chest.

It was clear to her that there was no sin in Kiseki. She has been cornered by the hatred and jealousy deep in her heart. If she wishes for it even a little bit, the variant's power makes her desire come true. Listening to her wishes was fine, but human beings don't live only on desires.

It forcibly granted her wishes, a heretical power that violated hearts of people, it was incredibly wicked and sinful.

"I won't let you pollute my friend's family——any more than this!"

Ouka didn't hate Kiseki, she hated the heresy residing inside of her.

Despite Kiseki's struggle, the variant pounced on Ouka. While swaying from side to side at high speed, it plunged onto her while raising a scream.

Although she intercepted them with the guns, there were too many.

《"Disregard interception and disengage! Thou hast ability to fly!"》

"How do I do it?!"

《"Envision it, as thy do that I shalt make it true!"》

As instructed, Ouka envisioned herself flying through the sky.

That moment, starting with the center, the cloak on her back had spread towards the back like wings.

Furthermore, Vlad increased the amount of magic used as propulsion. Ouka's body flew through the sky freely.

The speed of her flight was quite high, she thought that she'd be able to shake off the pursuers, but right behind her there were winged variants catching up and trying to intercept her.

She inverted her body and started shooting as she continued to fly.

As soon as they were hit, the variants' bodies scattered around like ash, dissolving in the air.

Like from bee's from a poked beehive, one after another the flying objects chased after Ouka.

《"Consider the amount of magic remaining. Thou hast already lost large amount of blood by using intrinsic magic. Converting any more of it into magic power is not advisable. Do something with the amount of magic power that is remaining."》

It was unreasonable. However, it was the first time Vlad has shown care for Ouka's body.

She didn't feel bad, nor she felt great but Ouka determined that it were accurate instructions.

Dealing with such a vast number of enemies was inefficient. Eventually, her magical power will deplete.

Ouka has devised the means of processing them altogether.

She changed the trajectory of her flight and headed directly above. She confirmed that the variants were chasing her, and steadily headed into the sky. When she entered the cloud her visibility worsened, but sun appeared in front of her soon enough.

After rising high enough to feel the moon right beside her, Ouka turned off the booster all at once. She drew an arch and started diving, the variants also started chasing her dutifully.

Once again, she started the booster's propulsion and increased the rate at which she fell.

When she reached an altitude of 1,000 meters, she turned her gun into particles and fused it with her arm once again.

The stakes slid to her elbow and started giving off a deep, red shine.

Altitude 500 meters, 300, 200, 100.

"Go——ooOoOOOOO!"

The moment she descended below 100 meters, she fired 《Count's Fang》 from her right hand.

The huge stakes were emitted, the sea of variants' center was the impact point. Like a missile, the stake exploded the moment it reached the sea of variants. Because of the explosion's impact, the sea has been blown off into the ground.

Ouka reversed the booster propulsion, decelerating.

"RAISEEEEEEEEEEEEEEeeeeeee!"

On the verge of falling to the ground Ouka rebuilt her body's posture and avoided the impact.

A mere moment after, the variant spheres from behind her which couldn't kill the momentum have crashed into one spot making a loud, fleshy and wet noise. The variants that couldn't retain their original form liquefied and began to fuse again.

Ouka, after landing on the ground, sliding, drew her left arm to the side, not killing its momentum after fall.

The moment all spheres trailing her have crashed down, she released three crimson stakes.

A roar resounded throughout the city. The stake has erased the fusion of variant spheres not leaving a trace.

"...haa...haa..."

Ouka seemed as if she was about to drop on her knees any time, she clenched her teeth.

"Are EXE's reinforcements here yet...?!"

《 "Other Dullahans seem to be under similar circumstances. However, Kurogane Hayato is heading this way. If that guy comes, the situation should visibly lighten up."》

"...Vlad, how long has passed since the battle started?"

《"Less than three minutes."》

"...we're going back. Our comrades will be in danger soon."

Ouka expanded her wing-like cloak and headed to the sky.

She intended to return to where her comrades were but,

"...no way."

In the direction she was traveling to, the air in there was completely filled with variant spheres.

The spheres laughed and giggled with Kiseki's voice. She dropped her line of sight, but the sea of variants that should have been erased was completely covering the ground.

She shivered seeing the rate of erosion being much faster than she expected it to be.

Although she wasn't all that confident when it came to her power, it was way beyond her expectations.

At this rate, far from destroying them all, her comrades will——

"Ngh, you're in the wayy——!!"

Enraged, Ouka rushed at the army of spheres.

While Ouka was struggling, Mari created a barrier, she repeatedly recreated it every time it was broken. About a half of the wall created by Ikaruga has been broken.

Every time Mari ran an operative procedure in her head she felt pain, she recalled the words Ouka said when she went to destroy the variants.

"...as if I'd lose."

Although it was silly little rivalry, it was enough for her raise her fighting spirit.

Mari laughed fearlessly and wiped the blood coming from her nose with her sleeve.

"...it's cause I've been asked to do this...by that stubborn woman...!"

While listening to Mari's monologue, Ikaruga and Usagi were taking actions of their own.

Usagi who ran out of bullets has removed a knife from her waist and by affixing it to the rifle with a winding belt, she made a bayonet.

"I will struggle until the very end. 'Giving up' doesn't exist in Saionji Usagi's dictionary."

Laughing firmly Usagi readied the bayonet.

Ikaruga picked up scattered empty shell casings in silence and put them in her mouth while touching the ground. It didn't have an effect to an extent of a Weiss Crystal, but she reinforced the damaged wall.

"Even a low-grade material like mithril isn't something that should be wasted. It's just like our platoon, I love it."

The three lined up intending to fight until the very end, without giving up.

They didn't escape and have come back to save Takeru and Ouka, they didn't have a speck of regret. If they instead fled as Takeru has ordered them to, it was then that they would have been regretting.

All of them felt that the place they belong to called 'platoon' was more important than anything else.

They were all folks beyond help who had an inseparable relationship, but if they were to die together, it might be satisfactory.

All three had the same thought, and lighting a flame in their hearts, they displayed the very last of their resistance.

——Unexpectedly, a metallic sound rang out behind them.

All three turned around. Hoping for Takeru to open his eyes, they looked back at him.

"............Take...ru...?"

However, what Mari has seen was——

"Make in time——make it in timeee!!"

Ouka destroyed the last sphere, and hurried towards the place her comrades were by maximizing the amount of magic power used by the booster.

The crystal wall has almost collapsed, the expanded barrier was also gone. The red meat all around flocked inside.

The variants crept onto the walls and continued to penetrate it.

Ouka's outstretched hand grasped the sky in vain.

——In that instant.

Suddenly, the wall that covered her comrades was blown away by a tremendous shockwave.

The impact engulfed the variants surrounding it and as if purifying them, has made them perish.

"——!! What... was that!"

Ouka who was flying in the sky fueled by the blast continued to look at the ground zero from which impact came, in order to understand what happened.

A cloud of dust rose up, it danced and scattered away from the highway.

Before the thing in the center appeared, a flame spread out in the area with a loud sound.

In an instant, the smoke cleared up.

What appeared, was Mari, Usagi, Ikaruga... and an armored knight wearing an irregularly-colored flame.

She wondered if it was Takeru, but couldn't determine it for sure.

Although she has seen the appearance of Takeru's Witch Hunter Form before, it was clearly different from before.

The armor not only covered his body, there was also a helmet on his head.

That wasn't all. The shape was different from before, it was more distorted, it has changed into a more ominous shape.

It was as if——as if a devil has come out of the myths.

Despite being puzzled, Ouka landed in front of the armored knight.

As if being protected by the armored knight holding a sword, there were three of her comrades behind him. All three were looking at Takeru unable to hide their surprise seeing this appearance of his for the first time.

Ouka too, was the same.

"...Kusanagi? Is that you?"

She asked fearfully.

The armored knight turned his amber-colored eyes embedded into the helmet towards her.

《"...yeah. *It's still, me.*"》

Certainly, it was Takeru's voice. It was a mechanical and flat, beastly and harsh distorted voice, but she could tell it was Takeru's voice.

There were many things she wanted to ask, relieved for the time being, Ouka smiled.

"That's great... that you're safe."

She ran up to him lightly and tried to convey her feelings to him.

If you and I, and those comrade of ours join forces it'll we'll be able to destroy this overflowing variant. Don't give up, we'll definitely save your little sister.

To convey what should be conveyed, she tried to put a hand on Takeru's shoulder.

However, before Ouka could put a hand on his shoulder, he put his on her shoulder. Ouka was off guard. That's because she believed in Takeru who was in front of her.

The moment she was hit by the flame, was the very same the armored knight touched her.

Unable to even raise a scream, Ouka was enveloped by flames.

There was no heat. However, she felt her body armor momentarily degrade.

The flames Takeru's entire body was clad with, scorched her armor piece by piece with a terrifying momentum, preying upon it.

A moment later.

——*clangg*!!

Ouka's armor crumbled, and Witch Hunter Form was forcibly released. Inside of her head she heard Vlad's scream of agony which reached her. The broken off pieces of magical armor were all sucked into Takeru's armor and disappeared.

She plunged forward and fell over.

Her body was gently embraced by the armored knight and supported.

"...wh...y..."

《"............"》

"......why...Kusanagi..."

Ouka put a hand on Takeru's chest armor.

Takeru, more strongly hugged her body.

There was no hostility, only kindness. The flame from before too, from the moment it wrapped around her she knew it didn't intend to attack her. Ouka felt all of magic provided to her by Vlad being lost to Takeru. In fact, even Ouka's life force was sucked to an extent of making sure she doesn't die.

She didn't know why would Takeru do such a thing.

He faced towards the astonished three in the back.

《"Mari, Usagi, Suginami... I leave Ootori to you."》

The three who had anxious expressions on their faces heard his distorted but kind voice and approached him confused.

"...Takeru, you... that appearance."

Mari looked from Takeru to Ouka's body judging it and then looked at Takeru with a worried expression.

《"...there's no time for explanations. While I'm still myself, you guys take Ootori and leave this place."》

"...but...what are you going to do..."

《"If it's a way out, I can make one."》

"That's not what I meant...!"

Takeru stood up, moved away from Mari and the others and took a thrusting stance.

A wind had blown, and variant's movement stopped abruptly.

A number of eyeballs sticking to the variant has rotated and their line of sight was directed towards Takeru.

An azure magical circle appeared under Takeru.

However, the magical circle that had a simple coloring at first has immediately undergone a coloring change. A golden color and the color of night sky, it was what could be described as light of twilight.

The light diffused, converged on the blade and released a glow.

"...... ......!"

Mari felt a wave of unknown magic power and moved back.

She didn't know why did she do that. Maybe it was a witch's intuition. Maybe a biological instinct.

Seeing the distorted light the sword was clad in, she couldn't help but be terrified.

《"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Unicorn's Destructive Lance."》

Takeru quietly muttered the technique's name and released a thrust.

The moment the godspeed thrust was unleashed, the blade grew. It continued to extend, it's length grew endlessly.

Variants approaching from afar were pierced and screamed.

Thrusts weren't techniques that would be normally used for wiping enemies in wide range. The thrust delivered a strong impact, but as far as damage went, it didn't deal much damage considering the enemy were variants.

However, the thrust Takeru released shined with the light of demise, and the same-colored flame swept down from the blade. A number of cries has rang out, and the variants were burned down by the flame surrounding the extended blade.

After that, the only thing remaining was a wavering, twilight-colored flame.

Takeru retracted the thrust and towards Mari and the others.

Between the comrades and Takeru there were burning twilight flames, creating a boundary line.

《"............"》

He stared at each of his comrades one after another, engraving their faces in his mind, and slowly turned around on the heel.

Then, he slowly started walking towards where his little sister was.

Mari and Usagi, feeling unspeakable anxiety and prompted by it, tried to call out and stop him.

"...KUSANAGI...!"

However, the one who called out first, was Ouka.

"DON'T GO...!"

Leaving Mari's arms, Ouka whipped her fading consciousness and reached out.

"...you need to carry the same burden together with me...!"

《"............"》

"I beg you...no matter the reason...don't kill your family with your own hands...!!'

《"............"》

"Even if that's....for her own sake...!"

Putting all her feelings behind it, Ouka reached out.

Takeru stopped his feet and looked up at the sky.

His inorganic, mechanical amber-like pupils reflected the moon.

《"...I, am not going to kill her only for her own sake..."》

He moved only his neck, turning back.

The amber pupils reflected the comrades.

Ouka understood. She understood the motive that pushed Takeru to kill Kiseki. Above all... his priority... rather than to fulfilling his little sister's wish,

——It were his comrades' lives.

He, in order to protect his comrades from Kiseki's power, intended to kill her.

"...don't...go...!"

《"Sorry, Ouka. I... can no longer walk alongside you. I am not qualified to do so."》

Ouka's vision became hazy in Mari's arms, although she continued to reach out, soon enough she lost her consciousness.

Takeru started walking, heading to his little sister.

"Takeru! You can't go! I... I don't get it, but you can't!"

"You are our captain! I won't forgive you for abandoning that position!"

His comrades shouted, trying to stop him.

Only Ikaruga turned away and remained silent. But the left hand that grasped her right arm bit its nails into it and trembled as she tried to hold down her emotions.

Takeru shook everything off, and headed forward.

《"I'm sorry... everyone."》

He cleaved horizontally with his sword and the flames howled.

Heading for the variant covering the world, clad in flames, he marched forward.

Takeru's figure was concealed by the flame, and before long it could no longer be seen by his comrades.

The mass of variant eroded buildings and formed distorted objects.

As if building a castle. Created with flesh, a castle weaved with demon power.

As he proceeded, a sound of intense weapon blows reached his ear.

"Khh——Haa!!"

The helmet girl used a sword and a machine gun to fight the tentacles pouncing at her. She probably did her best, as the ground around the girl wasn't eroded by the variants.

Single-mindedly she continued to kill them until this moment.

As the girl breathed roughly, she noticed Takeru's presence.

"...you... the owner of the other twilight-type...!"

《"............"》

"Kusanagi, Takeru...!"

The girl spoke Takeru's name and took up a huge red two-handed sword.

After a moment, Takeru slowly aimed the tip of his sword at the girl. Rather than showing willingness to fight, he was only responding to the opponent's movement. At the moment, no curiosity welled inside him as to why did the girl knew his name.

Breathing roughly, the girl raised the sword up.

"Orochi... the promise, I can't keep it. This guy has awakened too...! I need to stop him...!"

Reacting to the girl's hostility, red flames swept down from the two-handed sword she was holding. Opposite of the distorted flame released by Takeru, a red flame which looked as if it embodied anger has spread.

The two confronted each other. When the urgency and the heat in the location has reached its peak, the girl jumped up high.

It was more than ten meters above. A leap impossible for a human being to achieve, after rising up to the limit the girl rotated her body forward.

《"——!"》

Takeru who didn't move nor adjust his sword showed a reaction.

His self-consciousness disappeared for a moment as he caught the sight of the girl in the sky.

That stance. That movement. ——That was.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Mantis Slope!"

The girl rotated while in free-fall adding to the blow she released.

No matter how he looked at it, it was Double-Edged style. Takeru who used Mantis Slope multiple times himself was surprise being attacked with it. He didn't know why has this attacker has known the Double-Edged style, but he could easily tell that was the case since he knew those techniques.

Takeru lowered his sword, and taking advantage of it he swung the sword above all at once.

At the same time as the sound of explosion roared, both of their flames have destroyed the surroundings.

A shockwave was generated from the point of contact, and the highway has finally completely collapsed.

He and the girl fell down towards the location Kiseki had fallen.

Even as they fell, the two's battle continued. Red wings appeared on the girl's back and she approached Takeru who was falling among the rubble. In nine cases out of ten he wouldn't win against an enemy in aerial combat against someone who had an ability to fly.

However, currently Takeru had no difficulties flying.

Spreading out his own flames, he flapped them as if they were wings.

The girl clicked her tongue and attacked Takeru.

Takeru triggered Soumatou. The sword strikes released at tremendous speed occasionally broke the falling debris, they intersected and released impacts.

After the amount of strikes released exceeded 10's, they finally landed on the ground.

At the same time as they landed, both of them kicked off the debris and leaped at each other.

《"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——"》

With himself as the center, he rotated grandly adding centrifugal force to his sword.

The rotation turned their flames into a tornado.

And after the momentum reached its peak, he sank his total body weight low, striking the enemy with his sword.

《"——One-Eyed Storm God!"》

Once again an explosion roared. Twilight and red flames mingled, swallowed everything and destroyed it.

Their swords intersected, and they started loudly pushing against one another.

Whereas awakened Takeru was intact, the flesh-and-blood girl's body suit started to melt in the flame's heat.

The light ran through the full-face helmet and shattered it. When the cracked helmet turned to cinders, from inside appeared spectacular blue hair. When he looked closely, from behind the beautiful blue hair extended ears that were clearly longer than that of humans.

The girl sharply narrowed her eyes, and while raising a roar she put all the strength she had into the sword.

In silence, Takeru pushed that strength back.

The difference in their skill was obvious. Double-Edged style was never a style that relied on brute strength. It was devised in order to confront an opponent who was mightier than the user, it was swordsmanship allowing maximizing the output and granted advanced hit rate.

While maintaining his dying self-awareness. Takeru judged how competent the other party was. Concluding, that she was immature.

《"I don't know who you are."》

"Ngh...!

《"Why are you using Double-Edged style - I don't know, and I'm not interested."》

From his armor-covered mouth, Takeru released an indifferent voice.

《"There's not much time left for me... I'll have you retire."》

He declared, and at that moment.

The inorganic pupils embedded in Takeru's helmet suddenly were dyed bright red.

The armor near his mouth opened mechanically, and he bared long beastly fangs.

He let out a roar akin to a lament.

The tremendous roar incited fear in the girl, and was enough to fill her with dread.

"——Hiii."

The girl who still had very young facial features let out a short shriek.

That fear created a tremendous opportunity. Takeru supported the sword with one hand, made a fist with his left hand and retracted it.

《"Double-Edged style——Monk with Iron Mallet."》

Along with the technique name, the first Takeru retracted was swung at ultra-speed. He struck the sword's edge with all its strength. Normally it wouldn't have added a strong force to it, but this technique combined with Soumatou and heretical power——the superimposing blows allowed him to oppose her power.

Along with a heavy, clunky sound the jostling was come to an end.

"UwaaAAAAaAA——!!"

With an impact akin to explosion, the girl's body was blown far away.

The girl somehow outstretched her wings and tried to rebuild posture.

But, when she opened her eyes, an azure demon in front of her spread his wings of twilight.

His sword turned enormous and he took stance raising it far above.

《"——Protect yourself."》

The moment a distorted voice spun those words, Takeru unleashed the strongest technique he held which released eight attacks at once.

《"Double-Edged style——Yamata no Orochi!"》

It was a grand technique which could only be used as Soumatou was unleashed to its limit.

It was a technique from fairy tales which unleashed eight slashes at the exact same time.

Just before she was hit, the girl poised her sword, taking a defensive posture.

An eight-headed dragon swung down its sickle-shaped necks on her.

The girl succeeded protecting herself. However, she was unable to block it completely.

Her body, struck with the sword's blow was thrown to the ground at speed of sound. Not stopping at smashing her into ground, the slash made a huge crack in the ground.

The girl's figure disappeared in the crack.

《"…………"》

Not feeling emotions after the fight ended, Takeru lowered his sword.

He started walking in order to return to the highway's collapsed wreckage.

Clad in flames, staggering like a spirit, he looked for his little sister's figure.

It was as if his brain was burning, his head was full of noise. He was no longer sure what situation he was in. However, he knew that his own existence was disappearing as if melting and would greet its end soon.

He had to hurry.

While he was still Kusanagi Takeru, he had to fulfill the promise.

《"——Kiseki."》

He called his little sister's name.

Surrounded by debris and variant's meat, he didn't know where was she. As if wandering, Takeru tread firmly on the ground, scattering flames all around.

A warm wind was blowing with a loud sound.

Along with the flowing wind, waves of variants surged like a flood. All the rubble under his feet has become a part of the demon.

Takeru cut apart the demon waves and aimed for the variant's source.

Eventually, he found Kiseki's figure wrapped in white restraint suit.

He clenched the handle, and the sword shined for the third time.

It was signifying the end, the grant of gentle demise.

《"Ragnarøkkr Enchant"》

When he spoke the magic name, the blade shone even further.

Seeing Takeru's appearance in front of her, Kiseki was enveloped by fear.

Takeru tried to speak to her as her brother.

However, when he attempted to speak out, he noticed he is unable to.

Takeru's body no longer listened to him.

Therefore, he touched Kiseki's cheek.

"...ah."

Kiseki's distorted with fear expression shook.

The warmth, barely perceptible from outside the armor conveyed to her the fact of him being her brother.

"...Onii-chan...?"

She moved her arms behind Takeru and buried her face in his chest.

"Finally... you came, to end it..."

《"............"》

"I believed... that in the end... you will definitely come back to Kiseki..."

Rubbing her cheeks against him, Kiseki quietly shed tears.

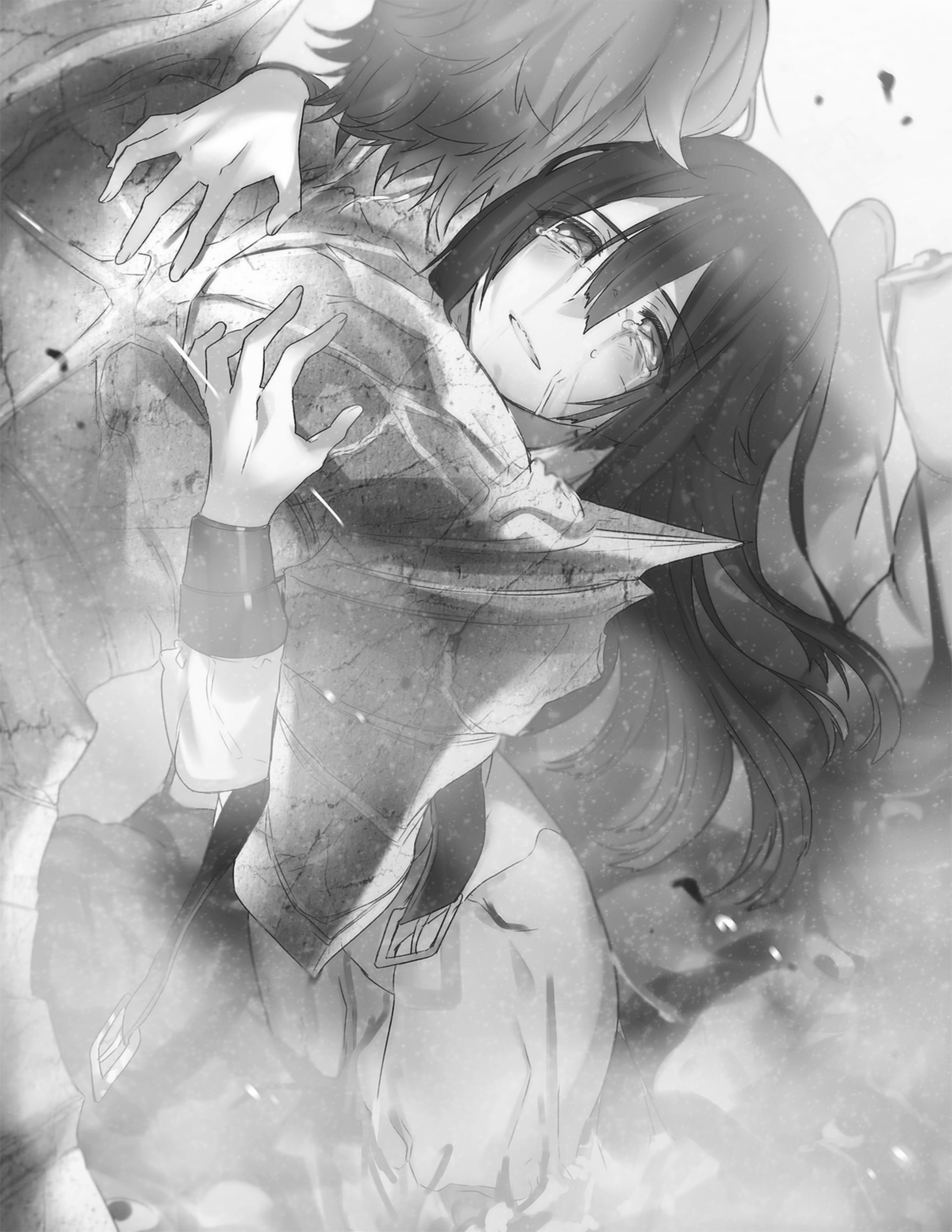
"Onii-chan...don't go anywhere...any more...stay with Kiseki."

That was her heartfelt wish.

It was the wish of nearly broken human called Kiseki, her only salvation.

《"............"》

A shine entered the inorganic amber pupils. The magical power of the steel covering his head crumbled, from inside Takeru's real face which underwent Mistilteinn's erosion was exposed.



There, were no longer any remnants of Takeru. His hair was of azure-color, his eyes were amber-colored. With skin as hard as steel, the boundary between armor and skin was lost as it fused into his meat.

Clad in twilight flames, while charring his little sister's body,

《*"Yeah...forever...togeth..er..."*》

Takeru hugged Kiseki with all strength he had.

After going this far, it was surely inevitable.

To protect Kiseki, to let her live a normal life... surely, it was just a pipe dream right from the beginning. He knew that this wish of his was too distant.

Even so, he continued to pursue it because he didn't want to admit it. That for Kiseki, dying by Takeru's hand was exactly the same salvation to her, he didn't want to admit it.

Takeru, as a human. As an older brother called Kusanagi Takeru.

He just wanted to grant his little sister happiness.

By granting his little sister happiness... he wanted to make himself happy.

...Ouka...I'm sorry...

With the remaining sense of self, he sincerely apologized to Ouka.

For not being able to protect the promise he made to her, to walk alongside her. Manipulated her, and while he still maintained consciousness he held his little sister's hand and betrayed her.

From the bottom of his heart, Takeru apologized to Ouka.

I...will kill Kiseki, and die myself.

If for Kiseki that was salvation, and if he could save his comrades' lives like.

If that's the only way——

Takeru grasped the sword tightly, and touched Kiseki's back with the tip of the sword.

Like that, he will pierce himself as well. If Kiseki desired death from Takeru, the aggregation of demons will also meet its end. Even if not so, the grant of this sword would obliterate any magical existence even if it were to be a God.

There was no need to hesitate.

Resolving himself, he retracted the tip of the sword and squeezed the handle.

——Are you really fine with that?

Suddenly, from the very depths of his soul he heard his own voice.

Along Takeru's cheek, tears have streamed down.

In his noise-ridden head, he saw the platoon room's door.

From the other side of the door, he heard his comrades' voices.

Takeru hesitantly put his hand on the doorknob. Along with gentle light, appearance of his comrades entered his vision.

Usagi was chewing on biscuits and flailing her feet. Ikaruga was reading a book. Mari and Ouka folded their arms in front of their chests and like usual, were at each other's throats.

Just seeing that scenery, tears flowed without stopping.

That was certainly, the place he belonged to.

His important place.

Comrades noticed Takeru, and when they smiled, the illusion faded away.

《"————Nghh"》

Takeru fully realized what it means to die.

He fully realized just how large and important that place was for him. He thought there was no need to hesitate any longer when it came to protecting his comrades by dying along with his little sister.

But he was wrong. Takeru has forgotten.

Thinking only about his little sister and his comrades, he didn't think of what he would feel in regards to his own death.

If he dies, he will no longer meet his comrades.

If he dies, he won't return to that place.

Something that simple should have been considered at the very beginning——Takeru had second thoughts.

《"Aa............uuaa....nnh"》

His mouth has woven a wail.

Inside of his chest, purely selfish thoughts were coursing through.

I——don't want to die yet.

《"...AAa...aaa..."》

Strength left his grasp on the handle.

Even though he promised... that they will die together, even though he did promise that.

In the very end, eventually, Takeru lost to his ego.

He lost to his feelings yearning for his comrades.

The sword fell from Takeru's hands.

How selfish, what a horrible guy, he scolded himself.

Even though he knew this choice led to the worst result there was,

Of all things to happen, to hesitate over his own life.

I don't want to die.

Simply for that as the reason——will it lead to the same result that happened five years ago?

............I don't want that!

Takeru discarded the sword.

He discarded the sword and held Kiseki even more strongly.

Just like Kiseki has granted memories of her suffering to Takeru, he tried to pour his own emotions into her.

Interweaving with his comrades, a number of emotions.

His growth as a person, and his own wish.

Inside of his head, the remnants of his existence were summoned and screamed.

Don't give up. Don't give up.

What's this, don't give me this shit. It's obvious that such a bad ending is no good.

As if I'd give up.

His comrades, his little sister, his own life.

It's not that I don't choose anything! I choose all of it!

It's fine even if I'm called selfish! I'm fine being selfish!

I won't go anywhere, I will live, and alive I will stay together with Kiseki!

But I——I want to go back to my comrades as well!

I'll take Kiseki and go back together with her!

That is my wish!

That's why no matter what happens to me,

No matter how difficult it is for someone else,

How sad it is,

Or hurts.

————Never again, I definitely won't give up!

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style Secret Art————Kusanagi Sword."

Takeru heard a voice at the same moment he resolved himself.

What he saw first, was a flash. Next, approaching from the front was a figure which turned into light.

Before he realized what happened, the light burst in the center of Kiseki.

Right in front of his eyes, Kiseki's body scattered in all directions.

As Takeru was being blown away by impact, he reached out to Kiseki.

Kiseki too, stretched her hand out to him, but her body began to disappear starting from the center.

Leaving only her head behind, Kiseki was swallowed by light.

Takeru's body was blown away and his consciousness fell into the darkness.

The Glossary

Ragnarøkkr Enchant（ラグナロク・エンチヤント）- It's written as（神殺しの付与）meaning "Godslaying Enchantment". So, why Ragnarøkkr and not Ragnarök? Because these two mean two different things, Ragnarök means "Fate of the Gods" while Ragnarøkkr means "Twilight of the Gods" and twilight appears very often in this book.

Epilogue

Smelling the scent of burning flesh, Takeru woke up once again.

His vision was hazy, distorted, and it wouldn't focus.

Just what on earth happened? His memory was vague.

Certainly, he separated with Ouka and went to persuade Kiseki... and what happened then?

Takeru couldn't remember 30 minutes worth of events in here.

"...e...h... w-hy..."

When he looked at his body, it seemed like he was lying on a piece of rubble.

Between his right shoulder to his flank, he could see a horrifying amount of damage.

It was no wonder he wasn't able to breathe for a while now.

Somehow, he felt like he tasted a situation like this before. Vaguely, he thought such a thing.

"——Geez, I didn't think ya would drop the sword and hug your little sister in the end. So, at the very last moment love has triumphed eh."

A voice came from the front and Takeru looked up. With his blurry sight he could see a figure clad in kimono.

His eyes were very unfocused and he couldn't see the face clearly.

"But well, it was correct answer. You've grown a little, my disciple. That sword will only grant you destruction... for that, your wish is just an excuse to do so."

The figure has closed onto him wobbly.

This voice.

That attitude, making fun of people.

He remembered it... there was no way he could forget it, it was engraved into him like a trauma, this guy,

This person was——

"Yo, Takeru. Ain't it been four years eh? Been real a while. Lookie how big you've grown! Can't see ya though!"

The man carrying a sword on his shoulder laughed cheerfully, looking nostalgic.

When Takeru's consciousness was about to shut down, his eyes focused, and he could see the man's face.

"...Ma...st...er...?"

The only one existing in the modern times, Kusanagi Double-Edged style instructor.

A heretic who stopped being a human and decided to live as a demon.

Kusanagi Orochi.

The monster which had beaten Double-Edged style into him said he came to see his disciple he hasn't seen for years and stood there casually.

"...geez, I'll go change the world〜you jumped out and left in a moment, and soon enough you pull out something as bizarre as twilight-type. Can't be helped."

Stroking Takeru's head strongly, Orochi smiled wryly to him.

His disciple who was hit by the secret art looked like he was about to die, but his heart was beating and he could breathe properly. Mistilteinn was probably giving priority to his life support, still, happy that his disciple was able to withstand his secret art, Orochi was slightly satisfied.

Beside, a buzzing has resounded and a blue-haired girl returned to his side.

Her right arm seemed broken since she was holding it with her left one.

"Hey, Diluted... ain't you all beaten up."

"............it's this guy's fault."

"So you didn't lose to little sister, but to this guy?"

The girl frowned and glared at Takeru who was sleeping.

"...it couldn't be helped. I didn't even turn into Hero form. It's obvious that I'll lose."

"Oh, excuses eh. Rather, haven't I told you not to pull it out? You know well how serious it might turn out when twilight-types collide against each other, don't ya?"

Orochi started hitting his shoulder lightly with the back of his sword.

"Don't be unreasonable."

The girl started inflating her cheeks, her expression turning into more and more pouty one.

Good grief, shaking his head Orochi sheathed his sword into a cane sheath.

"Perfect, it's time for the mission to finish. Transfer magic will activate in two minutes. Don't forget to pay atten——woaahh!"

After Orochi said that much, several bullets landed at his feet.

"Dangerous! Heyy! Who the hell was that dammit!"

Exaggeratedly showing his surprise, he yelled in the direction the bullet was fired from.

The one who shot with her gun——was Mari.

"Get away... from Takeru!"

Breathing roughly, she aimed her hostility towards Orochi.

Mari entrusted Ouka to Usagi and Ikaruga, and came chasing after Takeru alone.

She promised the two to definitely bring Takeru back.

On the way, she was caught up in Takeru's battle and was in danger under the rubble, but she endured somehow by using magical defense until this moment.

Orochi raised his hands exaggeratedly, trying to show her he has no intention of doing harm.

"Don't worry. This guy is my disciple. I won't do anything bad to him."

"I don't get it but it's a no. I won't give Takeru to you guys... he's our captain, and he belongs to us!"

Seeing Mari's serious expression, Orochi was slightly surprised and he looked at her and Takeru alternating between them.

I see, he understood the situation and turned towards Mari again.

"Talking about it would take too long. I intend to to take this guy to a certain country. How about it, want to come too? Judging from the collar you're a witch right? We'll welcome you."

"Come you say... you're Valhalla right?! I have no intention of involving myself with you any longer!"

"...that so. But I'm going to take this guy with me at any cost. I can't leave him in Inquisition any longer. If he keeps staying there, he'll just be used and eaten up."

Saying something meaningful, Orochi made a thin smile to Mari.

"Hey Missy... you, are a witch from outside right? Do you want to know the truth about this world?"

At first, Mari didn't understand at all what Orochi was talking about.

However, inside of Orochi's eyes there was a power which seemed to attract her, and charm.

She could tell at a glance that he wasn't lying.

"If you want to know, come with me. You're Takeru's comrade right. My disciple has been in your care, let me welcome you as thanks."

Feeling no hostility in his words, Mari hesitated to squeeze the trigger.

"You have thirty seconds, decide before then."

He said so, and looked at the girl with blue hair.

"Diluted, recover little sister's head. It should be lying somewhere here."

"...is that all right? If it's just a head, she'll go berserk again. Her power stopped going out of control but... it didn't disappear. If we hold it it might turn into another disaster."

"She's been hit by my secret art right on verge of being killed by her brother. She won't be able to reactivate that fast. We'll make it in time if we seal her right after the transfer."

"...Orochi, it's dangerous nearby.."

"Shut up dammit, stop talking back! It'll be too late if you don't hurry!"

The girl made an angry expression and approached Kiseki's head lying on top of the rubble.

Kiseki's head continued to have blood flowing out of it and she shed tears from her closed eyes.

She was alive. The girl stretched her hand out to it fearfully, trying to recover the head.

However, the moment she reached out, a gunshot sounded from somewhere.

At the same time, the place Kiseki's head was in has exploded

"————!"

The girl jumped back in a hurry, and a shadow slipped through beside her at high speed.

Not good, she was horrified. But it was too late.

Grasping Kiseki's head, there was a shadow with a gun in there.

The strongest Dullahan——Kurogane Hayato.

"You bastard again...! Ain't you fucking persistent after I've fought you a bunch already!"

Orochi clicked his tongue in irritation.

Hayato was grasping Kiseki's hair with one hand and aimed the gun at Orochi.

"Release Kusanagi Takeru and surrender right now. As long as you do so, I won't take your life."

"Thanks for that but I refuse. Sorry, but it's my win. I can settle this in a minute, that's the difference in ability between my great self and you."

"..........."

"Let's go with the painless option. We'll be taking Takeru. Your side can protect little sister... both sides will end up with a satisfying result, all right?"

Hearing Orochi's proposal, Hayato wasn't shaken at all.

Hayato put his finger on the trigger and released a stronger killing intent. Orochi too, sighed and put a hand on the sword-cane.

"——Stop that, Kurogane-kun."

A voice came from a different direction. Everyone looked towards it.

"If we're pulled into combat again... Kiseki-chan will wake up. That would be very troublesome... Mistilteinn's awakening has stopped, fighting is pointless."

Ootori Sougetsu has abruptly appeared, and he looked at everyone indifferently from the top of rubble pile.

His line of sight intersected with Orochi's and he grinned.

"Heya, Orochi-kun. Truly, it's been 150 years hasn't it. Been healthy?"

"...Ootori Sougetsu...!"

Orochi displayed his anger for the first time.

A glimpse of his fangs could be seen in his mouth and he displayed endless anger towards Sougetsu.

"...bastard, you used Takeru, and tried to repeat that again!"

"Are you, who have plunged the world into despair qualified to say such a thing?"

They seemed acquainted, the atmosphere around both of them collided incompatible.

Seeing Orochi's anger, Sougetsu laughed wryly.

"Even if you've obtained Kusanagi Takeru, that doesn't mean you have obtained Mistilteinn. We have the means of deterring Kusanagi-kun. His little sister and... his comrades are on this side, surely, that boy will come back to us."

Sougetsu stood there, lit up by the moonlight.

"You can struggle at best... you have already pulled the trigger of war. To make sure what you wish for won't happen, that hell will repeat once again."

"…………"

"And then, finally, magic will disappear from this world——the god-slayer will accomplish that."

At the same time as Sougetsu said that, a crystal-type instant charm started to shine in Orochi's pocket.

The transfer magic has activated. Under Orochi and the others' feet a magical circle has appeared.

"Let's meet again, Kusanagi Takeru-kun... it's because your soul is not that of a human, that you are our trump card."

After saying that to sleeping Takeru, Sougetsu walked away with his back turned to Orochi.

Orochi sent off Sougetsu by glaring at his back, and turned his face towards Mari.

"...it's time. Missy, what will you do?'

To his question, Mari clenched her first and looked back only once.

There was nothing behind her. However, Mari could clearly see the platoon room's door.

...I promised that I'll come back with him.

She envisioned spending time after school sitting on sofa with her comrades like she always did.

You two... I leave Ootori Ouka to you.

Mari sent the message to her comrades in her heart and turned towards Orochi.

"Take me with you. But remember this... I will definitely come back to this place."

She placed a hand on her chest and while staring directly at Orochi, she,

"——I will take Takeru, and definitely come back to where everyone else is."

As a member of 35th Test Platoon, she took a step forward.

——Then, Mari and Takeru have learned the truth about this world.

One month after Hyakki Yakou incident.

When Takeru woke up, he saw a pure white ceiling, surrounded by pure white curtains, it was a pure white room.

Is this a hospital. Were I fighting against something and injured again, I wonder.

The inside of my head is still blank... I can't think of anything... also.

Somehow, he had a feeling he woke up because of pain. Strangely, both his cheeks were hot in touch.

He blinked several times and his vision cleared up.

In the center of his field of view, right in front of him was a human face.

It was a girl with blue hair and long ears, she was looking down at him.

"......eh......"

"…………"

Seeing a peerless, beautiful girl at a distance where he could feel her breath his eyes turned into small dots.

The girl frowned with a dissatisfied expression and glared at Takeru.

"Eh...wha...?"

As he was greatly confused, the girl's face loomed even closer to his.

He noticed it this late, but the girl was currently straddling Takeru's entire body.

"Wai... eh, wha... too close, you're too close!"

"………… (zuzuzui)"

"Scary! W-w-who?!"

Pushing her away frightened, he loudly asked the question.

The girl, still having a sullen expression has opened her pale pink lips.

"...*Kanaria*."

"...ka-kana...?"

"Kanaria. My name."

"...o-oh. Kanaria huh. N-nice to meet you?"

"…………"

Just briefly saying her name, the girl with long ears... Kanaria jumped down from on top of Takeru's stomach; getting off the bed.

"Orochi, Takeru woke up."

Kanaria moved near the curtain and muttered towards the other side.

Then, from the other side of the curtain a voice saying "'aight" could be heard.

Even as his brain was still in a daze, hearing the name 'Orochi' Takeru's consciousness was awoken forcefully. Orochi. There was only one person Takeru knew to have that name.

The curtain has opened, and that guy showed his face beside the bed.

"Oh, you're up... hey, what's up with your face. Mumps?"

Kusanagi Orochi. Takeru's master.

The *culprit* who beat Double-Edged style into Takeru. Probably, in modern times he was truly the strongest swordsman there was.

"M-MM-M-Master——?!"

"Ho, indeed. I certainly am your master?"

At the same time as Orochi answered, Takeru jumped down and hid under the bed.

Seeing him way too panicked, Orochi frowned in puzzlement.

"This guy, he's still confused... rather, Diluted, how did you wake him up?"

"Hit his cheeks. Plenty."

"Hey, ain't that horrible."

"Just as Double-Edged style teaches."

"Don't make misunderstandings like that..."

Orochi smiled wryly to Kanaria who passed him a cup of water from the other side of curtain.

With a pale face, Takeru peeked out with half of his face from behind the bed, trembling.

"'Ain't any need to be that frightened is there. Well I indeed was strict when I was teaching you, but I didn't raise you so that you act like a scared chihuahua in front of me."

"W-why is Master? W-where's dis?! W-what 'appened to me?!"

In front of confused Takeru, Orochi strongly rubbed his head feeling it to be a pain in the ass.

"Hm, well... rather than explain it to you, for now, it'll be faster if you see for yourself."

"...see?"

"Open the window's curtain and take a look."

Told so by Orochi, Takeru stood up. Timidly, he put a hand on the window's white curtain.

When he opened it all at once, a dazzling light of the outside has entered his eyes.

That light, was not the light of sun. It was night outside. However, it was as bright as if it were a middle of the day.

That's because it was——

"Wha...t... this place..."

Seeing the scenery spreading outside the window, he lost his voice.

In front of his eyes, something akin to that of a city has spread.

Wrapped in colorful lights, it was a large and bustling city.

However, it was clearly different from the one he's been seeing up until this moment.

There were magical circles emerging everywhere.

People flying in the sky on brooms and talking with each other.

Floating in the air, there were large buildings.

Particles of magic were traversing the sky like fireworks.

Walking on the ground along with people were fantastical creatures that were supposed to be extinct.

——This place was flooding with magic that should have been cracked down upon by Inquisition.

As if it was part of the daily life.

As if it was perfectly normal.

In this city, an impossible spectacle has been spread.

As Takeru stepped away from the window, a hand was placed on his shoulder.

When he turned around, he saw Orochi who smiled as he said.

"Welcome to the inner world——and, to *Magic Academy.*"

In response to this astonishing reality, Takeru's consciousness grew distant once again.

Afterwords

It has been a while. Yanagimi Touki here.

This volume is protagonist's, Takeru's story. I think it's a bit, or rather, quite serious story. Did you enjoy it? If you did, then I'm really happy.

Now, little sister. Little sister's turn. In a way, it's in a form of the little sister boom that recently started to subside.

I want a little sister like this too～, or, I want to be attacked by a little sister like that too～, is what I kept in mind when I was envisioning the little sister. And there, I added just a little bit of evil god spice in there. Recently, cute evil gods are quite popular, like U— or Nya—, is what I felt like saying. Oh well, I have no principles. How sly aren't I, hahaha.

——How did it turn out like this.

...weird. At first it started off with a Magical Girl Kiseki kind of feel...

Jokes aside, to the main subject.

The theme this time was 'a problem one can't do anything about'.

Even among you readers, there are some who encounter such problems.

Having to balance out various things, distressing, pondering, wondering, unable to find an answer. 'It's all correct' or, being told 'you decide' and worrying. And yet, having to decide despite every choice leading to ruin for you.

What is the correct answer? That's the theme I used.

His final choice was a correct one, and yet...

In the entire story, there were various developments.

Of course, there's Takeru's little sister who was known only by name, or the two appearing. Finally the Christmas has come and yet the characters didn't get a Christmas event at all. Atoning for that with a miniskirt Santa. And more than anything, the truth revealed in epilogue.

What will the scattered 35th Test Platoon do from now on...

Next time, it will be the story about the magical side that's been shrouded in mystery, I'll do something concerning Mistilteinn, Lapis. Also, adding something about the new disciple, the blue girl would be nice. It's still continuing. Please look forwards to it.

...ah, this time, I am not going to talk about boobs. A-as for that, expect it in the volume 6 as well!

Now, credits. The one whom I probably inconvenienced the most this time, S-sama who's in charge of me. To the one who properly finished all the illustrations despite having a busy schedule, thigh-loving Kippu-sama. Hanao-sensei who always raises my motivation with the comic version. Everyone in Fujimi Shoubou who supported this work,

And all of you who have picked up and read this book, you have my thanks from the depths of my heart. Now then, let's meet again in the sixth volume!

Yanagimi Touki